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## Discussing inequalities from the periphery

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Recently, the Hungarian Geographical Bulletin – that had been a forum for introducing empirically focused papers covering various social and physical geographical issues for decades – became engaged increasingly in academic discourses on socio-spatial inequalities, embracing various approaches and problems with different scalar foci. The theoretical and methodological diversity that ranged from classical spatial analysis through humanistic geography to critical structuralism and post-structuralism represented a shift not only toward a conceptual openness in geographical discourses but also to a (more) socially engaged research agenda. This multiplicity and the ‘internationalisation’ of the journal – the switch for English language and the growing number of international authors – involved the Bulletin in academic discourses revolving around the major problems of socio-spatial polarisation, marginality, dependence and exclusion in European and also in global context. This special issue is meant to contribute to these ongoing debates on the diverse forms, contexts and processes of the (re)production of socio-spatial polarisation – form a Central and East European perspective, bringing authors together from various institutions and countries working together in the Marie Curie ITN project ‘Socio-economic and Political Responses to Regional Polarisation in Central and Eastern Europe’ (RegPol<sup>2</sup>)<sup>2</sup>.

Socio-spatial inequalities that manifested at multiple scales along various (economic,

demographic, social, environmental, political, etc.) dimensions in Europe and deepened further as a consequence of the recent crisis have raised criticism towards the neoliberalisation of principles and institutional practices of European and national policies, as well as towards the scholarly concepts that underpinned them. A growing body of academic research focused on socio-spatial polarisation – including East-West differences – explaining the process in the context of the global capital flows, European division of labour and of imbalanced power relations (in economy, politics and knowledge production) driving political discourses on development and cohesion and thus, the social construction of cores and peripheries (see e.g. SMITH, A. and PICKLES, J. 1998; SMITH, A. and TIMÁR, J. 2010; HAJDIMICHALIS, C. 2011; EHRLICH, K. *et al.* 2012; HIRT, S. *et al.* 2013). Moreover, series of studies focused on daily social practices at local scale in transition societies – revealing, how peripherality and marginality is experienced and responded to – raised a concern with agency and socio-cultural (historical) diversity in spaces labelled ‘backward’ or ‘peripheral’ in popular and political discourses (see e.g. HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2001; VÁRADI, M. 2005; STENNING, A. *et al.* 2011; NAGY, E. *et al.* 2015).

The evolving debates on macrostructural processes, discourses and daily lives (re-)producing unevenness stimulated the critical revision of embedded concepts of centrality, peripherality, polarisation and peripheralisation, raising arguments for relational thinking

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on power, agency and discursive constructions of space – and against dichotomies-led thinking (MASSEY, D. 2008; BERNDT, M. and COLINI, L. 2013; LANG, T. 2015 in this issue).

This special issue does not endeavour to give an overview of recent debates over the above notions. However, the papers question earlier argumentations, reveal the diversity of concepts of polarisation and peripheralisation, and contribute to their re-conceptualisation explicitly – by discussing the related theories critically – or implicitly – by employing relational approach and focusing on agency and on the social constructions of space. Thus, it is a forum not only for addressing the shortcomings of earlier research but also for challenging the dominant discourses on peripheralisation and polarisation ‘from the periphery’<sup>3</sup>, contributing to more balanced – socially and spatially ‘equal’ – relations in academic discussions and in policy making.

In his lead-off paper, Thilo LANG focuses on the problems and dilemmas related to the conceptualisation of the persistence and the recent, crisis-driven deepening of socio-spatial inequalities within Europe, stressing the complexity, interrelatedness and the multiscalar nature of structural changes, discourses and social practices that produce uneven social geographies manifesting in intra-urban, urban/rural, metropolitan/non-metropolitan, and East–West European polarities. He highlights the shortcomings of the foregoing research that failed to excavate the social relations driving peripheralisation and polarisation processes of and within Central and Eastern Europe through policy discourses and institutional practices, moreover, to address the entanglement of manifold core-periphery relations and their variegated socio-cultural contexts. A new analytical concept is proposed in the paper,

interpreting the notions of centralisation and peripheralisation as processes driven by multiple social relations, and the refocusing our research on how centrality and peripherality is constructed, performed, reacted to and reproduced by interactions and strategies of social agents linked to various scales. In this way, the paper contributes to avoiding the fallacies of dichotomy-biased thinking on the (re)production of inequalities in CEE and beyond – driving academic discourses often unperceived.

József BENEDEK and Aura MOLDOVAN focuses on a more specific aspect of spatial inequalities – yet contributing to the re-conceptualisation of academic research on this major issue. They provide a critical overview of approaches and concepts discussing economic growth, convergence, and polarisation to reveal their interrelatedness and to develop a relevant framework for explaining economic inequalities. Their discussion embraces

(i) the traditional and the new growth theories as well as the New Economic Geography that provide a sophisticated yet a limited (hard production factor-focused) explanation of persisting inequalities;

(ii) selected concepts of sociology and history advancing the introduction of new (“soft”) factors and of the time dimension into academic discourse, and thus, paving the way for new explanations of unequal economic development as a multidimensional process;

(iii) various concepts of polarisation that help to explain inequalities in the context of the global economy defined by highly imbalanced power relations. The authors argue for combining various social and economic factors (dimensions) in the convergence studies, for the introduction of the micro and the global scale into such analyses, moreover, for understanding convergence/divergence and economic growth as strongly interrelated processes that have a cumulative effect of spatial inequalities.

Bradley LOEWEN’s paper contributes to the re-conceptualisation of academic research

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to the ongoing discussion on marginalisation of social groups and spaces in academic and public discourses and to the arguments – forwarded by postcolonial theorists – for involving such groups in the debates to re-construct socio-spatial realities (see e.g. STENNING, A. and HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2008; KUUS, M. 2013; SHARP, J. 2011).



on socio-spatial inequalities proposed also by Thilo LANG. LOEWEN calls for a critical analysis of European Cohesion Policy and of the related discourses to reveal the causal relations of the neoliberalisation of European policies and of the national institutional practices with regional (sub-national) polarisation processes. He argues that the shift in the principles of EU Regional Policy (from cohesion toward competitiveness) along with the normative approach driving European institutional practices enhanced socio-spatial inequalities – instead of easing them by capitalising on regional qualities and diversity celebrated in policy discourses. He suggests to get a deeper understanding of various national socio-cultural and political contexts in which, such policies and practices are unfolding – for which, he proposes the Comparative Historical Analysis as a relevant conceptual framework – and reveal the power relations that underpin the discourses on regional development at various scales to move beyond the Neoliberal normativity of recent regional policies that cannot counteract to socio-spatial polarisation processes.

Péter BALOGH's paper takes us into the realm of popular discourse, focusing on the interrelatedness and the mutually constitutive nature of the material reality of peripherality, its perceptions and of the artistic and popular scientific constructions of marginal spaces. Relying mostly on the illustrative case of County Békés in Southeast Hungary, the author takes a historical journey across the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He analyses critically, how peripherality was perceived and constructed in sociographic monographs of the interwar period and under socialism, and in the literary sources and art films of the (post-)transition times – focusing not just on the content, but discussing also the wider social contexts as well as the authors' reflexions on their own position. BALOGH also contrasts the realities showed by artists and scientists to the romanticised and commercial images of peripheral spaces in popular scientific journals highlighting, how peripherality is constructed 'from outside', driven by non-local intellectuals. The

author's argumentation draws the reader's attention to the problem of positionality and the need for (self-)reflexivity – issues scarcely discussed in CEE-focused studies, so far.

The contribution of Garri RAAGMAA and Grete KINDEL put agency and social networks in the focus of their analysis. Discussing changing local social relations in two peripheral Estonian communities targeted by well-of urban dwellers seeking for second home they reveal, how the entry of a social group with major social capital assets (recreational home owners) has transformed local political landscapes. They point out that, while this powerful group extended its control over local processes – by exploiting their local and non-local networks – and stimulated structural changes for their own benefit, local residents' interests and needs were pushed into the background. The paper throws lights upon the significance of agency in local processes, and argues for discussing this issue in the context of highly complex power relations linked to various scales – to understand the contested nature of transformations in peripheral communities. By this, the authors also challenge the positive meanings of the notions of change and development in relation to peripheral spaces and call for including the emerging powerlessness and marginality in our research agenda.

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## Socio-economic and political responses to regional polarisation and socio-spatial peripheralisation in Central and Eastern Europe: a research agenda

THILO LANG<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In the past years, new patterns of regional disparities between metropolised core regions and the remaining parts of Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) have emerged. Such spatial disparities have lately fuelled concerns about further regional polarisation and the peripheralisation of non-metropolitan regions in particular. This is the case although balancing spatial development has been a major goal of European Regional Policy. The paper argues that there is a clear need to better understand the social, economic, discursive and political processes constituting regional polarisation and to conduct further research on approaches to deal with and respond to peripheralisation. The proposed research agenda focuses on a multi-scalar relation between core and peripheral regions and applies a process based dynamic understanding of peripherality and centrality. Following this, peripheralised regions bear agency capacities and cannot be seen as powerless victims of some overarching processes associated with the globalising economy. Applying the notions of polarisation and peripheralisation to guide further research, offers multi-dimensional, multi-scalar and process based conceptualisations of regional development research. With the proposed research agenda, I would like to open up the discussion on new interpretations of the terms peripherality and centrality, rurality and urbanity, border and rural areas, core and peripheral regions, and contribute to the development of new approaches in multi-level governance and ultimately in regional policy.

**Keywords:** territorial cohesion, regional policy, spatial disparities, uneven development, peripheralisation, polarisation

### Introduction

In the past 10–15 years new forms of disparities have emerged in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) but remained largely unnoticed by both the public and scientists in geography and regional studies: a strong socio-economic spatial polarisation between metropolised core regions and the remaining parts of the CEE countries (KRÄTKE, S. 2007; DUBOIS, A. *et al.* 2007; LANG, T. 2011). Such disparities have not only become a striking feature of the current settlement system but in the face of the ongoing economic, financial and national debt crisis have fuelled concerns about further polarisation and the peripheralisation of non-metropolitan regions. It is

striking that we can observe these processes and discourses although balancing spatial development to achieve territorial cohesion has been a major goal of European Regional Policy in the past years (EU 2011). As such, patterns of increasing socio-economic disparities combined with regional polarisation do not remain restricted to CEE, but rather can be found throughout the European Union and beyond, albeit at different degrees.

Against this background, there is a clear need to:

(1) better understand the social, economic, discursive and political processes constituting regional polarisation and interrelated policymaking processes in different contexts,

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(2) produce better knowledge on different disciplinary and cultural planning and policy traditions in the EU,

(3) communicate relevant information and improve multi-agent decision making for regional policy under uncertain framework conditions.

To achieve this, this paper proposes to enhance research on socio-economic forms of and processes interlinked with regional polarisation and peripheralisation, their wider impacts on society and everyday living as well as the (intentional and unintentional) responses and strategies conveyed by social, economic and political actors as well as 'ordinary people' in order to better deal with these phenomena. This includes research on (discursive and material) practices of the production and reproduction of peripherality and centrality as well as the logics of responses at multiple scales. With such a research agenda, a network of regional development experts throughout Europe suggests to respond to new patterns of regional disparities in CEE and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

Following this introduction, I briefly outline some empirical observations about socio-spatial polarisation in CEE and depict four main gaps in research on socio-spatial polarisation and issues of regional policy in Europe. Section two introduces polarisation and peripheralisation as analytical concepts. The following three sections are outlining propositions for further research in three interconnected fields:

- evolution, reproduction and persistence of centrality and peripherality,
- governance of core-periphery relations and
- adaptation, strategies and potentials.

<sup>2</sup> The research leading to these results was conducted in the frame of the project "Socio-economic and Political Responses to Regional Polarisation in Central and Eastern Europe" (RegPol<sup>2</sup>), coordinated by the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig/Germany. The project received funding from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme FP7/2007–2013/ under REA grant agreement no. 607022.

### **Some empirical observations and current shortcomings in polarisation research**

CEE countries currently show strong evidence for three main spatial development characteristics (KOMORNICKI, T. and CZAPIEWSKI, K. 2006): First, there are profound differences in development between urban core regions and peripheral rural regions with the urban regions performing much better. Second, these countries demonstrate strong trends towards polarisation between their main metropolitan area (usually the national capital) and the rest of the country, and third, an east-west-gradient can often be found within the countries with the western parts performing better than their eastern regions. As a consequence of these developments, today only one or a few strong economic 'engines' stand out against a growing number of regions with low economic dynamics which become perceived as less attractive locations for people and business. Thereby the sharp increase of regional disparities stands against the diminishing socio-economic differences between old and new member states on the national level (FINKA, M. 2007; MONFORT, P. 2009; CHILLA, T. and NEUFELD, M. 2015).

As a result, already existent patterns of regional polarisation have experienced a strong intensification in recent years (GORZELAK, G. and GOH, C. 2010), resulting in disproportionately high increases of regional disparities in the CEE countries compared to the EU15 states, measured e.g. in GDP-data (*Figure 1*) or in unemployment data (see DUBOIS, A. *et al.* 2007; ARTELARIS, P. *et al.* 2010; LANG, T. 2016; for the critics see OPENSHAW, S. 1984; for alternative measurements see e.g. PERRONS, D. 2012; OECD 2014).

Parallel with the growing concentration of economic activities in metropolitan areas current demographic developments further exacerbate problems of deepening polarisation (FILIPOV, D. and DORBRITZ, J. 2003; STEINFÜHRER, A. and HAASE, A. 2007). CEE population is increasingly concentrated in a diminishing number of prosperous areas, particularly the capital regions, in contrast

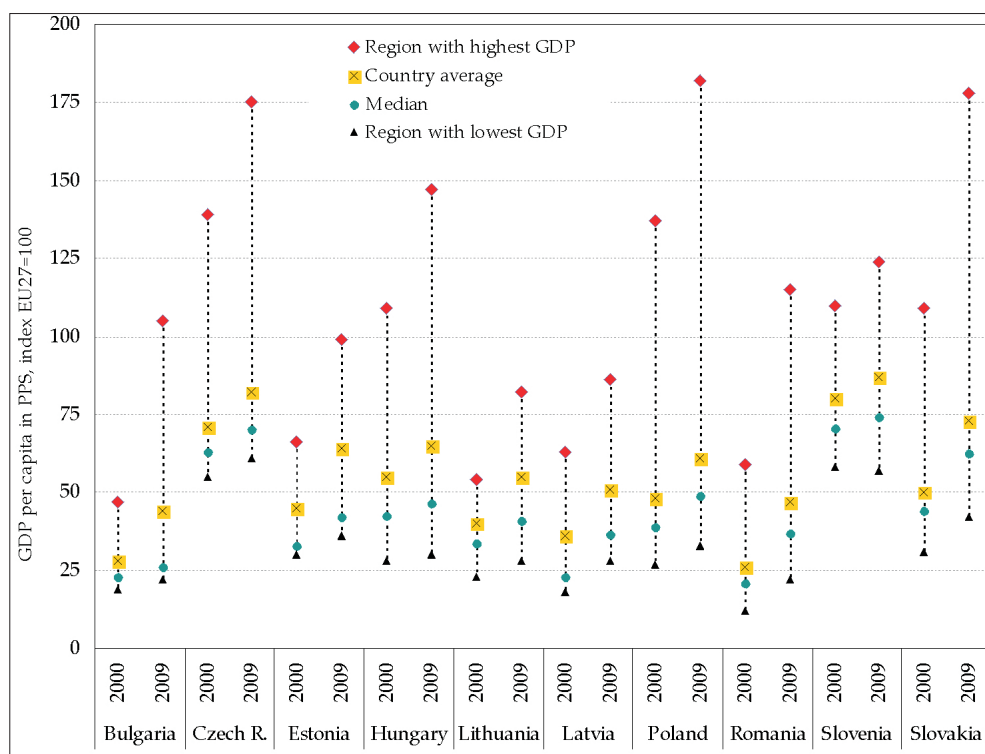


Fig. 1. Increase of regional polarisation in GDP per capita, NUTS-3 regions 2000 and 2009 (calculated by Tomas HANELL and Stefan HAUNSTEIN, data source: Eurostat)

to a growing number of regions suffering population decline. Thereby intra- and inter-regional migration patterns overlap with international migration on the basis of age-selectivity, stratified labour mobility and an overall decline of birth rates which is particularly sharp in CEE. The decrease in population has been particularly pronounced in structurally disadvantaged rural and deindustrialised regions as well as many inner-city and high-rise, edge of city areas (TSENKOVA, S. 2006; STEINFÜHRER, A. and HAASE, A. 2007). These demographic developments combine with other processes of social differentiation to produce highly uneven social geographies at regional, sub-regional, intra-urban, and micro-geographic scales that intersect but do not necessarily overlap (see also PoSCoPP 2015).

Looking at forms of peripheralisation at a global scale, it is notable that CEE re-

gions play a negligible role when world city hierarchies are analysed, such as by the 'Globalisation and World Cities Research Network' (GaWC) focussing on financial services and a number of specific globalisation indicators (only Moscow and Warsaw are recognised as Command and Control Centers and as Alpha World Cities (CSOMÓS, G. and DERUDDER, B. 2014; PARNREITER, C. 2014). Following FRIEDMANN'S and SASSEN'S work on the world or global city (FRIEDMANN, J. 1986; SASSEN, S. 1991), a number of authors have argued that worldwide economic activities have become concentrated in a small number of city-regions. In the globalised economy, only a few global cities and metropolitan regions are said to be the 'control points of the global economic system' (BEAVERSTOCK, J.V. *et al.* 2000).

One could argue that CEE cities and their functional regions are being peripheralised



by the dominance of world cities in the global economy. European and national policies add a further dimension to this, as they frequently copy the model of the global city in regional policies by focusing on the promotion of growth in metropolitan areas (BRENNER, N. 2009). So far, also European regional policy programmes and the introduction of new forms of regional governance did not help to achieve more balanced spatial development and to distribute development impetus more evenly across CEE regions. This has been witnessed particularly in the aftermath of the most recent financial and economic crisis, as decision makers have been led to concentrate scarce resources on supporting development in larger cities, hoping that disadvantaged areas will profit from core-periphery spillover effects. Such policies, however, carry a major risk of further increasing socio-spatial polarisations and the peripheralisation of disadvantaged areas (for example due to disinvestment in transport infrastructures or centralisation of service provision).

In addition, in CEE prevailing negative experiences from the period of centrally planned economies have led to a sceptical perception of public sector interventions and to a general turn towards neoliberal policies during the transition period (BOHLE, D. 2006; ALIGICA, P.D. and EVANS, A. 2009). This has to be seen in relation to both, uneven power relations in the context of supra-nationally imposed institutional reforms and the active involvement of East European reformers who were adherents of neo-liberalism even before 1989. Reviewing very recent changes in European policy debates, some authors have claimed that regional policy in the EU has become more neoliberal to the extent of distributive and cohesion aspects of regional policy (AVDIKOS, V. and CHARDAS, A. 2015) making a reduction of disparities in the next years less likely.

Despite the long research tradition in geography, regional economy, political science and urban planning, and even though core-periphery relations have been studied at global, national, regional and urban levels, the research on regional polarisation processes

up to now has been characterised by four major shortcomings:

- So far the main focus has been on quantitative, regionally limited studies. Only to some extent they do raise issues of interdependencies with phenomena and institutional contexts outside the respective regions, and by trend sparsely question regional socio-economic and policy responses and their normative dimensions. Further, most quantitative studies on polarisation work with GDP and population development indicators which cannot capture the multi-dimensional complexity of the phenomena under consideration.
- The social construction of core-periphery relations has been reviewed only to a small degree, especially in the CEE context (e.g. TIMÁR, J. *et al.* 2012; EHRLICH, K. *et al.* 2012). There is a clear need for a better knowledge about predominant discourses and paradigmatic backgrounds of European, national and regional policies in particular.
- Most polarisation and cohesion research ignores the overlapping nature of core-periphery relations at regional, national, European and global levels (SELLERS, J.M. 2002a). Researching the multi-level characteristics of socio-spatial development is in particular relevant for CEE countries which underwent a rapid exposure to processes of globalisation and internationalisation after the political changes in the early 1990s and even more so after their accession to the EU.
- Moreover, the formation of regional policies at the national level in CEE is still in its early stage (FINKA, M. 2011) and there is too little known about the ways, how regional policy responses and new forms of governance have emerged in CEE during the last years and how they inter-relate with other forms of local and regional response.

### **Polarisation and peripheralisation as analytical concepts**

The observations summarised above show that various processes lead to and interlink with socio-spatial polarisation at different in-

tersecting scales. Also apparent, however, is the need to look critically at our approaches to researching these phenomena and processes and to consider how and why different insights are produced from different perspectives. Thus, while helpful for the identification and assessment of the scope and reach of socio-economic regional polarisation, conventional indicators<sup>3</sup> rarely capture the wide range of causes and dimensions of polarisation as a process that intersects with other aspects of inequality, uneven development and power breaching conventional territorial boundaries (see also PERRONS, D. 2012).

I suggest understanding polarisation and peripheralisation as analytical concepts that facilitate process-based relational understandings of spatial differentiation and supplement structural research approaches (see also MASSEY, D. 2009; VARRÓ, K. and LAGENDIJK, A. 2013). Although our focus lies on the regional scale I suggest a multi-level conceptualisation of the phenomena under observation. As the relation of core and periphery is immanent to the concept, peripheralisation implies processes of centralisation and thus forms of socio-spatial polarisation at various scales. Such forms of polarisation are intrinsically connected to the discourse which places higher value on particular regions and developments and thereby devalues others. Some authors define regional peripheralisation as the growing dependence of disadvantaged regions on the centre (e.g. KOMLOSY, A. 1988); hence, it is not only the simultaneity of a number of features constituting the formation of peripheries such as distance, economic weakness and lack of political power (cf. BLOWERS, A. and LEROY, P. 1994). It is often also the dynamic formation of core and peripheral regions overlapping at different spatial scales (regional, national, European and global). This multi-faceted, multi-level understanding of polarisation has the potential to identify novel starting points

for research on current regional development issues. Applying these conceptual notions offers opportunities for spatial research circumventing dichotomous ideas of urban and rural, of central and peripheral, of 'leading' and 'lagging' or growing and declining which tend to determine our methodological, theoretical and normative approaches to regional studies.

In Central and Eastern Europe, focusing on processes of polarisation provides an important starting point for critical analyses of the assumptions on which the Washington Consensus of the early 1990s was built, such as the claim that radical privatisation and the swift introduction of unimpeded market-economies would right the wrongs of state-socialism most effectively and would (eventually) deliver prosperity to, if not all, then at least a majority of people. What we have witnessed since is a much more diverse and problematic picture: whilst in terms of GDP growth, many parts of the macro region – in particular the capital regions – have indeed embarked on an upward trajectory after the initial crisis of the early 1990s, the success of market reforms to improve living standards and to ensure a more even spread of wealth amongst wider populations has been limited (SMITH, A. *et al.* 2008; SMITH, A. and TIMÁR, J. 2010; STENNING, A. *et al.* 2010).

Up until recently, spatial development in CEE has mainly been researched through the lenses of post-socialist transformation and modernisation tending to perceive all processes in CEE as being quite particular and closing up comparative perspectives in relation to similar processes outside of CEE. This has also led to a limited research interest in inter-scalar relations and tended to favour internal reasons and innate properties as explanations for problems in social, economic and spatial development. Acknowledging socialism and post-socialism as being part of CEE history but adding alternative approaches (such as those being based on the notions of peripheralisation and polarisation) enables new comparative perspectives to similar phenomena in other parts of Europe and the

<sup>3</sup> Such as rates of inward investment, GDP growth, availability of key infrastructures and services, distance from metropolitan cores, or poor accessibility.

world and also helps to better conceptualise the role of super-ordinate processes and forces with impacts on CEE regions. This is particularly true since the 2007–2008 economic, financial and national debt crisis has shown similar economic, social and spatial impacts as well as political forms of response across Europe as a whole.

Following the outlined understanding of peripheralisation and polarisation, it is suggested to build up a research agenda based on five axioms:

(1) Socio-spatial polarisation should be seen as a multi-level, multi-dimensional process which is an intrinsic part of current capitalism and dominant market-logics. However, there is more and more empirically based research claiming that a socially and spatially more even society would also produce more growth (e.g. PIKETTY, T. 2013; OECD 2014 and 2015), adding an economic to the social argument for state intervention and regulation as well as a form of regional policy that maintains the distribution goal. Nevertheless, problematising particular forms and impacts of socio-spatial polarisation and defining urban and regional development keeps to be a social process (cf. PIKE, A. *et al.* 2007) and depends on what is seen as normal, acceptable or achievable in a societal discourse.

(2) Peripheries are made through material and immaterial processes and practices of peripheralisation and centralisation. It is these processes and practices which should be given more focus in social science based spatial research. All sorts of actors have their (implicit and explicit) shares in these processes, hence peripheralised regions cannot be seen as victims of some overarching processes beyond their control without any agency to them. Neither peripheries nor centres can be seen as static concepts with naturally given features and boundaries. Peripheralisation and centralisation are dynamic processes which can be reversed, rejected or redirected in the long run. Hence, when researching regional polarisation, we should direct our interest to these dynamic processes instead of static concepts of core and periphery.

(3) Urban and regional policy is always normative (even if its arguments are based on empirical data) and framed by individual and collective values linked to specific understandings and conceptualisations of development, desired policy outcomes and funding priorities. Such understandings, conceptualisations and priorities can be seen as the results of discourses linked to particular governance arrangements which are only partly state-led. The perceptions of acceptable and achievable forms of socio-spatial development are socially constructed and can only to a small extent be seen as the outcome of a rational process. Exactly for this reason, decision making and governance are constrained and shaped through specific institutional environments privileging and devaluing certain forms of action – certainly limiting the local and regional room for manoeuvre.

(4) There are similar – often overlooked – constraints in economic development and with regard to activities of economic agents: the economy is a social construct and can only partially be explained in terms of rational decision making; economic decisions are social decisions and reflect wider institutional and discursive constraints.

(5) Studying migration and mobility in the context of polarisation research is incomplete if it only captures quantitative processes without going deeper to conceptualise relations, motives and the circumstances of migration decisions. Migration should be seen as a (often temporary) result of subjective decisions in a household, family or social context based on personal and collective environments linked to particular place-specific values (in some cases we can talk about emigration cultures or a particular *modus agendi* inscribed to the institutional environment, see LANG, T. 2012a,b).

Following this conceptual argumentation, I suggest to focus future polarisation research on three objectives:

– to better understand the evolution, (re-) production and persistence of core-periphery relations using a dynamic conceptualisation of these relations,



- to identify and compare policy responses (and subsequent governance arrangements) to regional polarisation at different scales and understand how they emerged,
- to identify patterns of adaptation and resistance as well as strategies and potentials to overcome peripheralisation.

### **Evolution, reproduction and persistence of centrality and peripherality**

The evolution of core and peripheral regions does not follow any ‘natural’ order. Instead, centrality, peripherality and their interrelation are produced and constantly reproduced by social interaction, territorial mobility, political and economic decisions (BLOWERS, A. and LEROY, P. 1994; NAGY, E. *et al.* 2015). Although regional polarisation in this respect can change over time, the underlying structures are very persistent and tend to reproduce themselves (GIDDENS, A. 1993) – changes are thus rather an issue of generations and less likely to occur in short terms. Further research should consider how the perception of location (dis)advantages, migration and demographic developments as well as particular policies have contributed to the evolution, reproduction and persistence of centrality and peripherality and regional polarisation.

We could learn a lot about the formation of regional disparities and in particular about the emergence and persistence of peripheralities by looking at processes of centralisation and how the intentional and unintentional concentration of resources in and positive ascriptions to particular privileged places is to the disadvantage of other places. Research on the evolution, reproduction and persistence of disparities should also deal with the question of how core and peripheral areas are socially constructed in a multi-scalar way.

A number of studies explore the discursive relationships between economic centres and peripheries and argue that peripheralisation is a process which is strongly linked to how some spaces are represented by economic

centres (MASSEY, D. 1993; JANSSON, D. 2003; ERIKSSON, M. 2008; WILLETT, J. 2010) but also from within peripheralised places themselves (MIGGELBRINK, J. and MEYER, F. 2015). Here, peripheries can find themselves described in ways that reinforce dependency through being characterised as ‘stagnant’, ‘backward’, ‘rural’ and agents of their own economic misfortune. Such dominant discourses can lead to collective orientations hindering local economic development e.g. by increasing emigration (BEETZ, S. 2009; LANG, T. 2012b) or through a reluctance of ‘core’ businesses to work with peripheral organisations (BOSWORTH, G. and WILLETT, J. 2011).

It is in particular individual and collective perceptions, ideas and values that shape spatial policies, economic and household decisions – all of which contribute (by means of their material consequences) to the production and persistence of centrality and peripherality. Perceptions, ideas and values about and ascribed to a thing (or region) are constructed through formations of power. Such ‘knowledge’ is replicated through discourse by individuals, organisations and institutions. These affect how a place is perceived by others, placing limitations (or expectations) on what people and organisations are imagined capable of (ERIKSSON, M. 2008; BOSWORTH, G. and WILLETT, J. 2011). This is an ‘othering’ process, whereby one region is presented as qualitatively ‘different’ to another, and which mirrors contemporary regional development, whereby regions are encouraged to distinguish themselves from others in order to better compete in the global market (KEATING, M. 2008).

As despite all policy efforts, regional polarisation increased during the past years, we cannot be sure, if current sectoral and spatial policies help to reduce or rather reproduce peripheralisation and polarisation. To what extent do these policies reduce, reproduce or even reinforce existing centralities and peripheralities and to what extent can this be traced in new spatial instruments (such as metropolitan regions, cf. ALLMENDINGER, P. *et al.* 2015; see also RAAGMAA, G. 2015; FINKA,

M. *et al.* 2015). In particular economic policy in Europe is said to have followed neoliberal logics, thereby concentrating resources to a smaller number of places and furthering polarisation (e.g. AVDIKOS, V. and CHARDAS, A. 2015). Thus, it is relevant to raise the question to what extent this holds true for European, national and sub-national policies. Moreover, how broad is the current toolbox for regional economic policy within the EU and how are alternative ideas of development contested?

And finally, how do locally active decision makers, economic agents and ordinary people contribute to the emergence, persistence and reproduction of centralities and peripheralities? In particular with regard to economic and migration decisions, there is a need to better understand how the interactions of 'peripheral' agents with 'core' actors and their embeddedness into various local and non-local networks reflect, reproduce or counteract centrality and peripherality. What kind of spatial perceptions and relations do influence regional mobility and investment decisions? And to what extent do these decisions constitute and reproduce such perceptions and relations?

### Governance of core–periphery relations

For many authors, processes of and responses to peripheralisation are linked to issues of governance (e.g. RAAGMAA, G. 2015). Following the above outlined conceptualisation, governance research with regard to the development of peripheralised regions bears three major shortcomings: (1) instead of looking at territorially limited governance networks, a multi-directional perspective on core–periphery relations should be included; (2) the role of normative frames for the ways regional and economic policies are implemented is under-researched; (3) within governance-research, the role of single charismatic leaders is often overlooked. In general, however, the role of governance is often overestimated compared to other factors influencing local and regional development.

Although, with the Territorial Agenda 2020, the EU has been following the concept of territorial cohesion since 2010, there has been little research about the (national, regional, local) implementation of policy responses to intensifying regional polarisation. Further, regional development and planning policy in the new member states also reflects a particular turn towards neoliberal policies. "In these countries, the fragility of the planning systems following the breakdown of socialist-influenced structures led to a particular willingness to accept market economy and rather neoliberal tendencies" (REIMER, M. *et al.* 2014. p. 8). This coincides with a more general neoliberal shift in public service provision, public government and policies being catalysed through processes of "Europeanisation" (WATERHOUT, B. *et al.* 2013).

There is a tendency at EU-level, that issues of balanced spatial development and territorial cohesion are de-prioritised and replaced by the logic of competitiveness, place-based development and growth-based concentration (AVDIKOS, V. and CHARDAS, A. 2015). We could argue with SERVILLO that through discursive chains, these strategic concepts become hegemonic, making other ways of thinking, other 'rationales' and policy options marginal (SERVILLO, L. 2010; see also WATERHOUT, B. *et al.* 2013. p. 144) and leading to particular ways and forms of how core–periphery relations are governed. In this context, policies favouring the concentration of resources are on the rise at national and supranational level in Europe and beyond.

Some authors would see this as being linked to a process of Europeanisation through transnational learning and policy transfer (DOLOWITZ, D.P. and MARSH, D. 2002; BULMER, S. and PADGETT, S. 2005). It is suggested to perceive this process as being part of a more general shift towards neoliberal development concepts in the fate of the globalisation debate and a general global trend favouring the big cities as economic engines and attractive places to work and live in as a specific preference of the current capitalist society (see also KRÄTKE, S. 2007; WATERHOUT,

B. *et al.* 2013). It is in this context that we should analyse next to the emergence, the institutionalisation and implementation of regional policies and various forms of public interventions applying concepts of governance, path renewal and leadership.

The term 'governance' bears normative, theoretical and methodological dimensions (STOKER, G. 1998). This makes it necessary to entangle the different discourses around the concept of governance and to develop sound theoretical foundations to improve transnational comparative research on the governance of core-periphery relations. It is proposed to understand governance as a heterarchical, cross-sectoral, multi-level arena for decision making which works in specific, relatively stable network-type arrangements. When researching policy responses to polarisation and peripheralisation we should be cautious not to overlook the role of normative frames in formulating policies. To what kind of frameworks do actors refer to when they argue for particular forms of policy intervention? Which concrete planning instruments are used to achieve a more balanced development at regional level and what are the preconditions for successful collaboration within fragmented regions? Up to now only little is known about the conditions which allow for successful cooperation between actors from core and peripheralised areas that aim at balancing out regional disparities.

As differences in the economic structure of regions are often seen as one reason for increasing spatial polarisation, I suggest a particular research focus on the governance of economic development. Although there has been a lot of research on the problems of old industrial regions, still little is known about how urban and regional economies change and how this change can be governed in a positive way. What can we learn from governance attempts in successful new economy locations? How big (or minor) is the role of economic governance at all? Originating in institutional and evolutionary economics, the concept of path dependence has also been transferred to political sciences (PIERSON, P.

2000) and provides an important theoretical starting point for such types of research. It creates an opportunity to understand factors shaping urban and regional policy responses in old and new economy locations and to identify the actions and practices that may alter the current path and set the regions on new development trajectories (path renewal, COENEN, L. *et al.* 2015).

One attempt to explain differences in how localities and regions with very similar socio-economic challenges manage to regenerate is to analyse the role public leaders play (SOTARUTA, M. *et al.* 2012). We know, how specific institutional environments limit the local room for manoeuvre (LANG, T. 2009). Nevertheless, we know little about to what extent charismatic leaders can promote institutional change and develop adaptive capacities (NORTH, D.C. 1990) to open up new development trajectories in localities with severe social and economic problems. The impact of leadership on these forms of change so far is clearly under-researched.

### **Adaptation, strategies and potentials in peripheralised non-metropolitan areas**

Although often receiving only marginal attention in national development strategies, non-metropolitan, rural and peripheral areas are home to almost half of the European population, bear major spatial functions and in many cases play a decisive role in political, social and economic innovation processes (McCANN, E.J. 2004; MCCARTHY, J. 2005).

Questioning current paradigms which regard the city (and in particular the metropolis) as the major centre for social, economic and political innovation, non-metropolitan areas should also be considered as arenas within which future development perspectives arise (SHEARMUR, R. 2012). However, peripheralised places are often conceptualised as powerless and passive victims of some superordinate processes beyond their control. This position often makes us overlook the varied dimensions of agency and strategic

action linked to ‘peripheral’ actors. These forms of agency can range from social interaction reproducing existing core-periphery relations to specific forms of adaptation or even resistance to dominant representations. With a focus on adaptation, strategies and potentials, It is suggested to conduct more research on (the sometimes hidden) phenomena relying on local resources.

LACLAU’S and MOUFFE’S reworking of hegemony explores how the ‘powerless’ can propagate alternative forms of knowledge through networks and cooperation, challenging dominant representations (LACLAU, E. and MOUFFE, C. 1985). When applied to regional development, this indicates that the ‘knowledge’ within representations of place has particular effects, and that this knowledge undergoes processes of change and rearticulation. Instead of perceiving uneven power-relationships as something fixed, a more satisfactory analysis would explore the multi-dimensional aspects of power through mechanisms such as hegemony. Here, peripheries are not passive recipients of damaging ‘backward’ and ‘stagnant’ types of representation, but play an active role in the discursive process. This leads to questions about ‘peripheral’ strategies of reworking or resisting dominant representations (ERIKSSON, M. 2008) and opens up possibilities for a multi-scale conception of centrality and peripherality (SELLERS, J.M. 2002a,b; MCCANN, E.J. 2004; HUDSON, R. 2004, 2005).

Against this background, household practices as well as innovative activities from civil society and businesses in peripheralised spatial settings could be analysed regarding their potential for new forms of regional development and bottom-up social, economic and policy change. To what extent do ‘ordinary’ people organise their life under the conditions of peripheralisation? In what way do they rework, reproduce or resist dominant processes of peripheralisation? What kind of (alternative) futures do they aim for through every day practices? Key tasks could be to analyse households’ changing experiences and perceptions of socio-spatial polarisation,

and to explore how they overcome existing core-periphery disparities.

We should also link a number of alternative economic approaches to the household scale which stress locally rooted and embedded forms of economic activity. One example for such an approach discussed as a source for alternative economic development in rural areas is the renewable energies sector (biomass, wind, solar energy). Although in general there is a considerable job effect of renewable energy activities (and other ‘alternative’ and ‘new’ forms of economic activities) throughout Europe, it is quite unclear to what extent local communities can benefit from such activities. Hence, I suggest to differentiate community driven from externally driven initiatives. In so doing, we could conceptualise these activities acknowledging their direct local and social impact. Locally owned projects would guarantee that revenues stay in the region and also that key entrepreneurial aspects could be negotiated locally. Research could, thus, focus on the role of local potentials and resources and the ways policy makers aim at boosting life satisfaction, the living standard and to promote local and regional development.

For regions with severe social problems, also the social economy has often been seen as a normative solution. However, empirical research has concluded that the economic impact of social economy activities has mainly been symbolic (AMIN, A. *et al.* 2002. p. 116, 125). In particular when it comes to newer forms of social innovation and more recent attempts to re-invent the social economy, there is scope for more research on the role of social economy initiatives in non-metropolitan regions (EHRlich, K. and LANG, T. 2012). There are two main themes for future research in this respect: first, there should be a focus on the individual and collective drivers of a new generation of social enterprises working more and more independent from state benefits, and second, the role of the state should be carefully examined as supporting the social economy has also become a state strategy to compensate for its



withdrawal from public service provision in peripheralised areas.

Researching innovation in the *formal* economy in non-metropolitan regions, should start with reviewing the more recent literature on knowledge and innovation (BATHELT, H. and GLÜCKLER, J. 2011), on different types of knowledge transfer (e.g. BOSCHMA, R. 2005) as well as on critical network theory perspectives (GLÜCKLER, J. 2013). The inclusion in global networks of information flows and production chains as well as the various ways to generate innovations are completely under-researched when it comes to entrepreneurial activities in peripheral regions (as exceptions: VIRKKALA, S. 2007; LAGENDIJK, A. and LORENTZEN, A. 2007), but these aspects bear the potential to challenge dominant perceptions of the relation between the economy and space. This is all the more important since innovation can contribute to both an increased regional polarisation and a balance between core and peripheral regions. With a less normative perspective on the relation between innovation and space, policy makers will be better able to identify and utilise the economic potentials and opportunities of their regions and to promote change from an entrepreneurial bottom-up perspective.

## Conclusions

Although the European Union has been following regional and cohesion policies for years and stressed the objective to achieve balanced spatial development and territorial cohesion with the Territorial Agenda, regional socio-spatial polarisation increased in the past years. In particular in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), there is a risk that spatial development further concentrates in a smaller number of (metropolitan) regions whereas more and more other regions might be affected by processes of peripheralisation. In this context, I believe it is timely to conduct further research on the relevant issues of regional polarisation and peripheralisation with a strong focus on CEE.

So far, regional development research has been interested either in ‘winning’ core regions, or in shrinking, declining or peripheralised rural, non-metropolitan or old industrial regions. By contrast, the proposed research agenda focuses on the relation between cores and peripheries (respectively processes of centralisation and peripheralisation), a process based conceptualisation of the issues to be researched and an understanding of peripheralised regions with agency capacities instead of being perceived as powerless victims of some overarching processes beyond control. Peripherality and centrality should be perceived as revisable characteristics and as socially, culturally or discursively constructed.

Applying the notions of polarisation and peripheralisation offers multi-dimensional, multi-scalar and process based conceptualisations of regional development research which are under-represented in European urban and regional studies. With the proposed research agenda, I would like to open up the discussion on new interpretations of the terms peripherality and centrality, rurality and urbanity, border and rural areas, core and peripheral regions, and contribute to the development of new approaches in multi-level governance and ultimately in regional policy.

While research on polarisation up to now has focused on a specific spatial level (mostly the region itself), I suggest to approach spatial relations from a multi-level perspective by looking at the interplay of local, regional, national and international contexts, structures and processes which affect socio-spatial polarisation. Thereby, I stress the need to tackle these issues in a multi-method and multi-disciplinary approach open to diverse conceptual backgrounds of all researchers in urban and regional studies following this agenda. I strongly believe that each disciplinary and methodological perspective has its contribution in this field. There is no ultimate truth which can be proven by any kind of (quantitative or qualitative) data. Hence, the proposed research agenda is meant to add to existing studies and should be seen as an

invitation to think differently about the phenomena each of us is going to research.

We do hope, the proposed research agenda will produce a more complete picture of perceptions, processes and understandings of regional polarisation and socio-spatial peripheralisation in CEE and beyond. I have highlighted so far under-researched issues of the evolution, reproduction and persistence of centrality and peripherality, issues linked to the governance of core-periphery relations and some aspects which might bear potentials for alternative forms of development and de-peripheralisation. This might also invite others to tackle research questions linked to achieving better futures for peripheralised regions and improving the information base for political decision making under the conditions of polarisation and peripheralisation as complex, multi-dimensional and multi-scalar socio-spatial phenomena.

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# Minsk and Budapest, the two capital cities

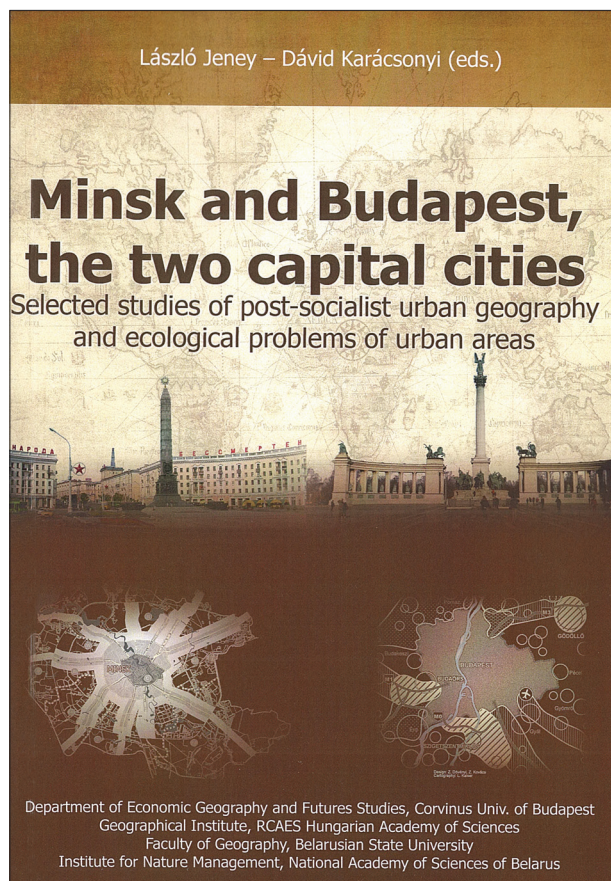
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While Budapest used to be the bridge between the West and East in Central Europe, Minsk seems to be in a similar role between the Russian and the EU-Polish influence zones. It means that both capitals are situated on the frontiers between the Euro-Atlantic and the Euro-Asian macro regions. Besides their situations, their similarity in size renders the comparison and the cooperation obvious to proceed. This book is based



on the mutual co-operation of Hungarian and Belarussian geographers and gives a scientific outlook not only on the socio-economic development of the two cities but on the urban climate, environment and ecology as well. Hungarian authors of the book introduce Budapest as a Central European metropolis with its historical trajectories and the results of the post-socialist transformation. They also demonstrate the main features of large housing estates and the results of their rehabilitation. Authors from Belarus show the major issues of spatial structure planning of Minsk in a similar context, describing the past and the present changes taking place in the spatial structure of the metropolis. The integrated assessment of the state of urban environment in Minsk is examined also focusing on the ecological frame of the environmental planning in urban agglomerations. The volume serves as a good starting point of a fruitful co-operation between Belarussian and Hungarian geographers dealing with a social and physical urban environment, the state of which deserves extra attention especially in East Central and Eastern Europe.

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## Economic convergence and polarisation: towards a multi-dimensional approach

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### Abstract

The current increase of regional inequalities in Europe, and in particular in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has led to the reconsideration and revival of the concepts of “polarisation” and “convergence” in academic fields like regional economics, economic geography and spatial planning as well. In contrast to the classical view on these concepts determined by functionalism and topology, the new theoretical and empirical perspectives are emphasising a multidimensional perspective. In addition, there is an important debate about the relation between economic inequalities and growth. This article provides a critical overview and assessment of the theoretical and empirical work on regional inequalities with special emphasis on theories of economic and social polarisation, regional economic growth, convergence, and social inequalities. We attempt to combine two powerful concepts of polarisation and convergence, emphasising their relational and multi-scalar nature. Building on this basis, we propose a multidimensional concept of socio-economic polarisation, which comprises processes of convergence and divergence, growth and mobility in economic and social dimensions.

**Keywords:** regional inequalities, economic convergence, polarisation, Central and Eastern Europe

### Introduction

In the last decades we have experienced a general growing tendency of regional inequalities. However, the views on the intensity and direction of regional inequalities differ widely from one author to another, depending on the scale, timeframe and methodology of the analysis. In Europe the majority of the authors seem to agree that while the disparities of national economies decreased in the last decades, sub-national economic inequalities have been increasing. Such processes were fuelled by the rapidly growing metropolises and national capitals (London, Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Prague, Bratislava, Bucharest etc.) and the parallel peripheralisation of rural and old industrial regions. In addition, the financial crisis has stopped the decreasing tendency of regional inequalities between Member States from 2008 on.

The Cohesion Reports of the European Commission (EC) have clearly indicated these polarisation and peripheralisation tendencies at sub-national level and proposed the strengthening of territorial cohesion by guiding one third of the EU budget to the reduction of economic and social disparities in 2014–2020 (EC 2004, 2007, 2010, 2014). However, despite this consensus, there is still a confusion resulted by the employment of the different concepts used in the quantitative studies of mainstream economic and regional science (convergence/divergence) and in qualitative approaches applied in economic geography, spatial planning and sociology (centralisation/peripheralisation, polarisation, marginalisation).

This paper offers a critical review of different theoretical concepts focusing on regional inequalities. We have selected theories and concepts relevant to the convergence/diver-

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gence and polarisation debates<sup>2</sup>. The neo-classical and the new theories of growth are considered as the mainstream approaches in this field, thus, main statements and developments must be discussed here. Historical polarisation and sociological theories – more ‘heterodox’ in content and methods, and marginal in the field of economics – shall also be discussed below to deliver important arguments towards the development of a multi-scalar and multi-dimensional approach on regional inequalities.

Our paper is focused on the connection of polarisation and the socio-economic processes of differentiation. Drawing on a literature survey, we summarise the facts of the main theoretical and empirical approaches discussing the problems of convergence and spatial polarisation in the first section. In the second, we propose a multidimensional concept of polarisation and convergence, which comprises economic and social dimensions. We conclude with our final remarks and with prospects for further research in the third section.

### **Economic growth, convergence and polarisation: theoretical approaches**

Core-periphery structures in economics have always been defined as process-centred, unlike approaches in economic and urban geography that employed a traditional definition that is rather location-oriented and static and where the new process-oriented perspective offered by introducing the term “peripheralisation” (LANG, T. 2012; KÜHN, M. 2015) seems to be a promising innovation.

The basic position of mainstream economics is that, regional inequalities relate strongly to economic growth. Therefore, the main focus of the economic literature related to regional inequalities is whether economic growth produces increasing or decreasing inequalities. Furthermore, the economists rely on the so-called convergence-studies as analytical approaches to understand the relations between growth and inequalities.

Apart from the question, whether economic growth leads to an increase or decrease of socio-spatial inequalities, three other important issues are related to the above-mentioned concepts:

- First, taking into account the important regional variability of economic growth, how can the different economic growth rates between regions be explained?
- Second, how important is the spatial context for these differences?
- Third, what are the consequences of the spatially differentiated economic growth for spatial policy, or more explicitly, which are the recommendations for regional policy in order to diminish regional inequalities and increase territorial cohesion?

In the following subsections several theoretical approaches will be summarised and critically evaluated to reveal, how these basic concepts contribute to the understanding of regional inequalities. We discuss traditional approaches on growth and convergence (the neoclassical exogenous growth theory, the post-Keynesian theories, and the export base theory, as laid out in the 1950s), as well as contributions from economic historians and more heterodox approaches (economic and spatial polarisation approach; sociological approaches on inequalities). These are followed by an account of the most recent theoretical developments (new economic geography, new growth theory) and by an overview of the recent empirical work on convergence.

The selection of literature is not meant to be exhaustive. It focuses on widely cited concepts and their selection was inspired by the works of SCHÄTZL, L. (1998), BENEDEK, J. (2004) and KÜHN, M. (2015). We have summarised the

<sup>2</sup> The research leading to these results was conducted in the frame of the project “Socio-economic and Political Responses to Regional Polarisation in Central and Eastern Europe” (RegPol<sup>2</sup>), coordinated by the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig/Germany. The project received funding from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme FP7/2007–2013/ under REA grant agreement no 607022.

main statements of the analysed approaches, evaluated according to the following key questions: how the development of inequalities is explained and what tendency for the evolution of regional inequalities is expected.

### *Traditional models of economic growth*

Studies on economic convergence are rooted in the *neoclassical theory of economic growth*. The dominant concept between 1950 and 1980 was the Solow-model of exogenous growth, where the output is determined by three factors: capital, labour and technological progress (SOLOW, R.M. 1956). Technology is assumed to be a public good, while technological progress (including advances in basic science) is assumed to be exogenous. This means that technological progress has the same contribution to economic growth in all regions, leading to the assumption that GDP per capita should grow at the same rate in all regions (FAGERBERG, J. 1995).

Nevertheless, due to the different regional initial conditions and, accordingly, to the different regional capital-labour ratios, poorer regions (with low capital-labour ratio) are growing faster than the richer ones, thus, regional inequalities tend to decrease and finally, should disappear. The model offers a simple explanation for the evolution of regional inequalities: under the assumption of constant returns to capital, once a region achieves its steady-state as a result of long-term development, it will grow at the rate of technological progress. The farther is the region from its steady-state, the larger its growth rate of GDP per capita can be. As a consequence, poor regions will tend to grow faster than richer ones, which could result in income convergence (SOLOW, R.M. 1956; MANKIW, N.G. *et al.* 1992). In this model, convergence is determined by the capital flows directed from regions where it is abundant to regions where it is scarce, in order to achieve the highest rate of profit on capital.

One of the weak points of the neoclassical growth theory comes from the fact that it is

not concerned with regional differences in the use of production factors and in the organisation of firms. Another weak point is the assumption on the free flow of production factors that is refuted by empirical facts. For example, a major share of capital transfers and foreign direct investments are taking place between advanced economies (SCHATZ, A.J. and VENABLES, A.J. 2000). Moreover, the labour has no unlimited mobility due to the high living costs, the differences in social and cultural environments, the accessibility of jobs etc.

Under these circumstances regional inequalities between rich and poor regions can not diminish. In addition, empirical work has proved that capital and labour costs explain only a small part of actual growth (FAGERBERG, J. 1995). As a consequence, the equalisation of inter-regional inequalities as stated in the neoclassical theory is not confirmed by the empirical results, being thus less adequate in explaining regional inequalities.

Keynes' theory focused on demand and on state interventions, considered investments as a key factor for economic development, and did not address the question of convergence directly. The latter problem is discussed explicitly in the *post-Keynesian theory* such as in the Harrod-Domar model relying on the assumption that the import determines the growth of regional economies (HARROD, R.F. 1939; DOMAR, E.D. 1946). Regional investments exercise three types of effects on growth (SCHÄTZL, L. 1998), such as income effects, capacity effects (increasing production capacities and increasing capital stock) and complementarity effects (forward linkage effects on the suppliers' sector and backward linkage effects on the consumption).

The theory suggests that equilibrated growth occurs when the demand growth has the same intensity as the growth of production capacity, reflected through income and capacity effects. All these effects contain a spatial component: capacity effects generated by investments are connected to a location, their spatial distribution and characteristics being linked to the factors determining the spatial distribution of investments. The in-



come effects and the complementarity effects are spatially diffuse, being more intensive in the place of investment and decreasing with the distance from the place of investment.

*The export base theory* represents a variety of Keynesian growth theories. It concentrates accordingly on the demand side, more exactly – unlike the former one – it focuses on the external demand (NORTH, D. 1955). The key argument is that the export activities realised in one region generate a cumulative regional development process. The size and time persistency of external demand for certain products or services determines the regional growth via multiplier effects, while a declining export demand generates the decline of the whole region (MALECKI, E.J. 1997). One of the weak points of this theory lies in its methodology: it distinguishes basic and export oriented activities and sectors, thus, calls for a very detailed and not always accessible statistics. In addition, the above-mentioned differentiation is highly dependent on the size and delimitation of the region. Another constraint is related to the urban economies, which are realising an intense internal commerce, the export sectors having a lower share.

The theory induces a major reduction by the exclusive focus on the export activities, neglecting important internal growth factors like the increase of the internal consumption, the change of the consumption function, endogenous technological development etc. (SCHÄTZL, L. 1998).

### *The sociological approaches on inequalities*

Social theories in sociological approach have long been considered with inequalities, looking at how various resources are being distributed within a society (EAPN 2014) and also at the resulting social differences between various groups. Social inequality in this sense can be found wherever the accessibility of social goods and powerful positions are systematically restricted, thereby favouring or impairing the lives of the affected in-

dividuals or groups. Inequalities manifesting e.g. in limited access to occupational, educational and financial opportunities might lead to social exclusion and marginalisation.

At the same time, exclusion from social networks of power – having little to no chance for influencing the decisions affecting daily lives – also contributes to such marginalisation. Indicators used to measure social inequality and marginalisation empirically can be assigned to one of four interconnected dimensions: wealth, knowledge, organisation (understood as the status of a profession within an organisational hierarchy) and association (or social capital) (KRECKEL, R. 2004). This means – very broadly – that socially marginalised groups are characterised by low income, a low level of education, a high level of unemployment and no access to power holding social networks.

It is important to note that all these four dimensions are mutually dependent and each one explores a significant side of the structural heterogeneity, which is determining the distribution of resources. However, one dimension is being emphasized for the purpose of capturing inequalities, and that is wealth – or, indicating the lack of wealth, poverty (KÜHN, M. 2015).

In the EU social policy inequality is analysed mainly through the distribution of income. Moreover, non-financial assets (such as property, shares or investment, especially, housing) are increasingly considered while analysing the wealth of households (EAPN 2014; MAESRTI, V. 2015). Nevertheless, sociological studies are concerned mostly with social relations that individuals, households and groups are embedded in and which shape the patterns of social inequality (KRECKEL, R. 2004).

More complex studies on social inequality and social exclusion supported by the EU also include non-financial indicators such as life expectancy at birth, access to services (education, health and housing), old age dependency, share of foreign-born population, nutrition and sustainability (Corpus, A. 2014; THIRY, G. 2015).

In order to link social inequality to the peripheralisation discourse, it is helpful to consider KRECKEL's conceptualisation of peripherality (2004) as a structurally embedded constellation of conditions, which results in limited access to generally available and desirable resources (material or symbolic) for the people and groups affected, leaving a restricted room for autonomous action to them. In our interpretation, the difference between marginalisation and peripheralisation is the following: the first term refers to socio-structural exclusion, to pushing a group of people to the edge of social hierarchy, while we consider the second as the socio-spatial dimension of the process. Peripheralisation, thus, can be described as the gradual decline in socio-spatial development in relation to the dominant centre (KEIM, K.D. 2006).

The importance of the spatial dimension for social inequality is acknowledged also by EU social policy. One of the key factors used by EU policy-makers to determine which groups of people are at risk of living in poverty is "living in a remote or disadvantaged community where access to services is worse" (EAPN 2014, p. 32). The structural disadvantages that people in peripheries face are limiting their capacity to improve their situation and raises the risk of falling into a vicious circle: given the lack of services including educational facilities, and the limited choices of career paths in peripheral areas, those who have resources for migration will leave, further diminishing the human capital and the chances of change in the region they leave behind (MASSEY, D. 1990). Moreover, apart from the actual lack of physical and social infrastructures, the inhabitants of marginalized places have to deal with the negative effects the image of backwardness, spread "from above", through political, popular and scientific discourses, as well as "from below", through daily routines and interactions (WACQUANT, L. 2007).

Uneven development has always been a major theme in social theory. Famously, Karl MARX compared the level of development between societies, looking at the modes of

production at a national scale. His interpretation of the law of capitalist accumulation includes the criticism that any emergence of wealth and capital concentration goes together with poverty and oppression. Moreover, MARX views uneven development as intrinsically linked to the transition from one mode of production to another: as an old mode declines and a new, more progressive one rises, different growth patterns are created, resulting in uneven development (BOND, P. 1999).

Developing the Marxist approach by adding a spatial component explicitly, David HARVEY (1996) sees the increasing inequalities in development as a result of the competition between different places for attracting investments. In this process, the differentiated return on investment creates or destroys certain spatial and class configurations – on a local, regional and national scale (BOND, P. 1999). Depending on how successful they are in attracting investments and capital, the spaces described by HARVEY enter core-periphery (dependent) relations with each other, as LANG, T. *et al.* (2015) argued. Moreover, Henri LEFÈVRE (1991) linked uneven spatial development specifically to real estate investments, through which, inequalities in capital accumulation are transposed into space (residential patterns; unequal provision of urban services).

While neither poverty nor inequality are bound to certain physical spaces and can be found in all types of societies, sociological studies have a strong urban bias (GOTTDIENER, M. and BUDD, L. 2005). The inequalities within cities have been increasing since the 1980s, due to suburbanisation processes and the resulting concentration of poverty in the central urban areas. Nevertheless, sociological studies are also concerned with global interconnectedness of countries and cities and the uneven development within the global labour market that resulted in the rise of major cities as high command centres.

The process produced an increasing power concentrated in central urban areas on the one hand, and the expansion of commercial spaces dispersed across space on the other

(GOTTDIENER, M. and BUDD, L. 2005, p. 73). SASSEN, S. (1991) considers these major cities as 'global' ones, and describes their rise as hosting processes of growing polarisation in terms of occupational and income structures.

A very similar image, focused on the polarised occupational structure within global cities, is described by MOLLENKOPF, J. and CASTELLS, M. (1991). Each of the cited scholars is concerned with migration flows that play a crucial role in enabling this process of polarisation due to the expansion of low-skilled and poorly paid jobs occupied by immigrant workers in global cities.

However, the above concepts have been criticised for employing unstable, value-laden concepts and for oversimplifying the empirical reality by reducing it to a simple dichotomy. HAMNETT, C. (2001) argued that the phenomenon described by SASSEN in global cities is rather caused by professionalisation, typical of post-industrial societies than polarisation. Moreover, shifting the focus from individuals (as SASSEN discussed it) to households might produce a clearer image of the occupational structure in global cities, as it would shed light upon the increasing inequality between households (work-poor and work-rich households), as it was argued by HAMNETT.

The household focus might also support the shift from the dichotomic view of polarisation processes (command centre vs. production periphery) towards a deeper (multidimensional) understanding of this socio-spatial phenomenon (GOTTDIENER, M. and BUDD, L. 2005, p. 66).

What all these sociological theorists have in common is that they have a critical view on inequality and stratification, and consider them as the results of the modern capitalist relations of exploitation and exclusion in which, some individuals or social groups benefit at the expense of others. In capitalist societies, the differences between cores and peripheries is seen as the result of capital investments, concentrated in urban and suburban settlements, where the rate of return is the highest. The investment sets off a cumulative effect, creating jobs and generating

tax revenues, enabling public investments to better infrastructure and the quality of life. The resulting highly differentiated life chances of the respective residents support the reproduction and the enhancement of socio-spatial inequalities (GOTTDIENER, M. and BUDD, L. 2005). The argument continues by considering the forms of social inequalities typical of modernity and capitalism, shaped not by the independent achievements of individuals or social groups, but by their ascribed characteristics. Thus, inequalities are considered to be persisting at various scales, while the gap between rich and poor is deepening (KORZENIEWICZ, R.P. and ALBRECHT, S. 2013).

The general weakness of the sociological approach to inequalities lies in the vague definition of the concepts of core and periphery (KÜHN, M. 2015). This also means that the identification of spatial core-periphery structures, at any scale, remains a subjective matter. Even though, sociologists have focused on the inequalities in cities, we agree with KÜHN (2015) on that the poverty concept can easily be transferred to regional scale: if a large number of households or municipalities experiencing poverty are concentrated in a particular area, it should be considered as a periphery at regional scale. Such peripheries are the results of deindustrialisation, ageing and demographic shrinkage, lack of investment, low level of income and out-migration of higher educated and young people (KÜHN, M. 2015).

### *Historical approaches*

Historical approaches embrace all contributions of economic history to studying economic development and growth. The theories elaborated on this ground advanced the idea of the multi-stage and linear economic development path (GERSCHENKRON, A. 1962). One of the most influential models was proposed by Walt W. ROSTOW (1971), that combines economic (productivity, investments, knowledge), demographic (mobility), political (role of the state) and socio-cultural factors to identify five stages of economic growth: traditional society,



transition to take-off, take-off, maturity and high mass consumption epochs.

Certain economic sectors are dominant in each stage, and the take-off is driven by industrialisation. Whereas, John FRIEDMANN'S (1973) four-stage core-periphery development model (preindustrial, incipient industrial, advanced industrial and post-industrial stages) suggests a clearer spatial accent, assuming that each stage of development corresponds to a certain type of spatial structure (SCHÄTZL, L. 1998). In his model, the spatial structure evolves from an initial equilibrium situation – with a high level of isolation between settlements and a low level of spatial interactions – into a complex spatial structure, with a high level of functional interdependencies between the core and the peripheral regions. In the fourth stage of development, a new spatial equilibrium emerges characterised by low level of regional inequalities.

The four-stage model developed by Harry W. RICHARDSON (1973) rests on a similar logic; nevertheless, this concept is more complex and introduces the idea of reverse polarisation. It attaches the decentralisation process of economic activities in the third stage of economic development, when investments and population migration are oriented from the core regions to the centres of the peripheries, producing a more balanced urban and regional structure (SCHÄTZL, L. 1998).

It is obvious that historical approaches have contributed largely to the regional inequality debate, by combining a large number of economic, social and institutional factors and also by offering an alternative narrative to the formalised neoclassical models. Moreover, these models combine the time and space dimensions, re-interpreting the processes described otherwise in the formal models, such as spatial diffusion, agglomeration and concentration.

The latter processes can be explained by the concepts of polarisation and depolarisation, as they appear in the four-stage model of RICHARDSON. Nevertheless, detailed analysis of the above concepts revealed their weak points, such as their descriptive character, the

linear, one-way logic of economic development – that limits their explanatory power on economic decline and crisis – and the lack of empirical findings on the final (equilibrium) stages of development characterised by declining regional inequalities.

### *Theories of economic and spatial polarisation*

The *theories of polarisation* include the seminal works of Gunnar MYRDAL (1957), Albert O. HIRSCHMAN (1958), Francois PERROUX (1950), Nicholas KALDOR (1957) and the later developments of these theories, i.e. the concepts of development poles and the core-periphery models. Unlike the neoclassical theories, the theories of polarisation consider interregional inequalities growing, since the development advantages created in a region have a cumulative character determining the spatial and sectoral polarisation of socio-economic development. This cumulative process is triggered by the change of independent economic variables like the demand, income, investments or production (SCHÄTZL, L. 1998).

The change of one variable induces a change of other variables, generating a cumulative process of polarisation. Thus, the equilibrium analysis specific to neoclassical theories was replaced by the concept of circular cumulative causation, introduced first by MYRDAL (1957) and KALDOR (1957). According to this concept, the intensity of interregional inequality is determined by the intensity of two effects: the backwash effects through the migration of mobile production factors (labour, capital) from the peripheries to the core regions, and the spread effects emanating from the spatial diffusion of innovation, production and services from the core regions toward the peripheries.

Generally, the backwash effects are more intensive than the spread ones, which generates growing inequality tendencies. Exceptions are represented by the core economies where inequalities are decreasing due to the development of infrastructure and communication.

The other basic assumption of polarisation theories is that polarised development is generated by the unequal regional distribution of growth factors (labour, capital, technology, infrastructure, investment and consumption functions, natural resources) and by the limited mobility of such factors. The concept suggests that relations emerging between core regions and peripheries are characterised by strong dependence and the economic growth of cores is possible only at the expense of the peripheries.

Later, the *concept of growth poles* was developed further by PERROUX (1988) and by Jacques-Raoul BOUDEVILLE and José Ramón LASUÉN (SCHÄTZL, L. 1998). Their key assumption is that the growth poles are urban centres which polarise a larger region, where a single major firm or an economic sector generates a growth process and interregional inequalities. As a consequence, the latest approaches to the growth poles adopted the idea of sectoral polarisation that leads to regional polarisation and to the establishment of spatial growth centres. The intensity of polarisation effects depends on the market share and on the size of the dominant economic sector. The factors for the concentration of development in growth poles are related to the localisation advantages of production factors. The possibility of spatial diffusion of growth towards peripheries is admitted.

An important contribution to the polarisation theories came from LASUÉN, J.R. (1973) who argued for that the explanation of unequal economic development can be reduced to the unevenly distributed technological innovation process (diffusion and adaptation). This process has two components: a temporal one, represented by sectoral innovation poles, and a spatial one, represented by urban poles. These two poles are strongly interconnected, thus, the urban network determines the differentiation of the innovation process concentrated in a relatively small number of urban agglomerations of the advanced economies. Meanwhile, innovation in non-core economies and in smaller urban centres rests on external development fac-

tors and on adoption through imitation or diffusion. The intensity of adoption depends on the innovation capacity of the regional or urban economy that reinforces spatial concentration and polarisation.

The main weaknesses of polarisation theories lie in their rigid framework and the lack of explanatory power of historical turning points in regional development (KÜHN, M. 2015).

*The core-periphery models of world-system theories and the dependency theories* add a power dimension to the relations of cores and peripheries (FRIEDMANN, J. 1973; WALLERSTEIN, I. 1974). According to these theories, the core regions (or countries) are innovative, play an active role in the international trade, export capital, produce high incomes, have high productivity and a stable political system. In contrast, peripheries are less innovative, they depend on capital import, have a minor role in international trade, low incomes and productivity, and they are unstable politically. As a consequence, peripheries are dependent on the centres and disadvantaged by unequal terms of trade.

WALLERSTEIN distinguishes semi-peripheries that are economies with both characteristics of the core and also of the periphery (WALLERSTEIN, I. 1974). Semi-peripheries experience the highest mobility, and their prospective ascension to the status of a core region is determined by state interventions. The proponents of these theories do not consider the elimination of spatial inequalities by any development policy. From a geographic point of view, the above mentioned global core-periphery model can be identified at sub-national scale as well, emerging as a North–South divide (UK, Italy) or West–East disparities (Hungary, China, Germany), depending on national factors.

The weak point of the core-periphery models is represented by their strong focus on conflicting relations between centres and peripheries, reduced to a simple dualism of a powerful centre and a weak periphery (KÜHN, M. 2015). Nonetheless, the theories of polarisation offer a relevant theoretical framework for the analysis of regional in-

equalities. Their core-periphery concept is a useful analytical concept for the description of the spatial outcomes of polarisation processes, and their central idea of growing interregional inequalities corresponds to the main empirical findings.

#### *New approaches to unequal development and growth*

The *new economic geography* (NEG), grounded by Paul KRUGMAN and developed by a range of economists and economic geographers during the last two decades offers a new perspective on the mechanism of unequal regional development, based on the agglomeration process of industrial activities. NEG uses the new trade theory introduced by Alfred MARSHALL (external economies, agglomeration), and two modelling techniques such as the Dixit-Stiglitz model of monopolistic competition and the iceberg function (KRUGMAN, P.R. 1991).

According to the NEG's two-region model, a core-periphery structure evolves that determine their relationships: one of the regions ends up as an industrial core region, the other region becomes an agricultural periphery. The central element of the model is the mobility of manufacturing workers determined by interregional wage differentials. This induces a process of cumulative causation in the region with higher wages, where additional workers attract more firms as a result of increasing demand, which in turn attracts more workers from the periphery. This cumulative process might come to an end in two ways:

- First, if the centripetal (agglomeration) forces (market size, mobility of workers, positive external effects) are dominant, it results in a cumulative-circular, divergent and asymmetric development model, with one region achieving the core status, while the other becoming periphery.

- Second, if the centrifugal (dispersion) forces (immobile factors, e.g. natural resources, negative external effects, competition) are dominant, a regional convergence model

prevails with low interregional differences. KRUGMAN (2011) considers three factors that can modify the relation between centripetal and centrifugal forces:

- a) economies of scale in industrial production,
- b) transportation costs, and
- c) demand for industrial goods.

The traditional growth models were seriously challenged by the *endogenous (new) growth theories* represented by Paul R. ROMER, Robert LUCAS, Robert J. BARRO and Xavier SALA-I-MARTIN in the 1980s. Technological progress was considered as an endogenous growth factor (determined by R&D, advanced education facilities etc.) by them, playing a central role in economic growth through increasing returns. As a consequence, the endogenous growth theories offer a picture with growing inequalities and economic divergence, where the driving factor is represented by the spatial concentration of knowledge and the spill-over effects generated by R&D (ROMER, P.M. 1986).

New growth theories pay much attention to the theory developed by ROMER, which brings a novelty by considering monopolistic technological knowledge and imperfect market conditions. Another novelty was added to the debate by considering the dispersion effects resulting from industrial research. These dispersion effects are considered a major factor of technological development, in contrast to other new growth theories that propose different factors, like competences obtained by practice ('learning by doing'), or the dispersion effects resulted from capital investment (ÁCS, J.Z. and VARGA, A. 2000). Nevertheless, the lack of spatial dimension in new growth theories has limited their adaptation in economic geography (STERNBERG, R. 2001).

New concepts in this field explain regional convergence or divergence and regional differences by factors like the differences in the human capital, increasing returns, learning effects, firm agglomeration, interregional knowledge transfers and in innovation diffusion.

Recent studies added a further dimension to classical convergence studies by including the questions of income distribution and

the growth rates of income (TSELIOS, V. 2009; AMARANTE, V. 2014; CASTELLS-QUINTANA, D. and ROYUELA, V. 2014). For example, as TSELIOS (2009) suggested, there is a convergence not just in the growth rate of income, but also in growth rates of income inequalities. Moreover, while earlier concepts relied on macroeconomic variables (e.g. GDP per capita), recent studies have adopted a new microeconomic dimension (TSELIOS, V. 2009; RODRÍGUEZ-POSE, A. and TSELIOS, V. 2015), based upon household income data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). Generally, the lack of adequate regional data on household and individual income is one of the main reasons for the dominance of the macroeconomic approach.

It is a crucial question, because economic growth measured by GDP per capita has no relevance at individual scale, even though, the income distribution affects regional growth (EASTERLY, W. 2001; DOLLAR, D. and KRAAY, A. 2002; EZCURRA, R. 2007; RODRÍGUEZ-POSE, A. and TSELIOS, V. 2010). Even more intriguing is the fact that empirical studies show convergence in incomes, in contrast to GDP per capita changes in Europe (EZCURRA, R. and PASCUAL, P. 2005; TSELIOS, V. 2009).

Furthermore, recent studies introduced new concepts in the economic convergence/divergence debate and suggest that regional inequalities have a cyclical evolution: phases of growing inequalities and divergence are followed by phases of declining inequalities and convergence. However, according to QUAH, D.T. (1996), economic growth and convergence are related, but they are logically distinct processes. It means that one can occur without the other (QUAH, D.T. 1996).

An important dimension of *the regional convergence debate* is the role of spatial interaction effects, geographical location and proximity disregarded in the neoclassical convergence studies. Regions are open to a range of economic and demographic flows, like knowledge spill-over, interregional trade, capital mobility, spatial mobility (migration and commuting); moreover, other types of regional spill-over and their effect cannot be

neglected, as they are important factors of regional growth. Spatial spill-over affect the economic growth strongly, while the convergence process is different across spatial regimes (ERTUR, C. *et al.* 2006). Therefore, spatial autocorrelation cannot be eliminated from the growth models without the risk of imposing serious restrictions to the model. Thus, we should not overlook spatial effects across borders and the spatial structures within regions.

In growth theories, the concept of polarisation is used to describe processes of spatial concentration of economic growth. Thus, polarisation should be considered a special case of economic divergence, moreover, the process of polarisation – the concentration of economy (and population) in certain urban centres – is contributing decisively to the production and reproduction of core-periphery structures.

A new approach in *the convergence studies* has been suggested by SALA-I-MARTIN, who found a slow convergence inside the group of developed countries (SALA-I-MARTIN, X. 1996). This finding was reinforced by other studies, and, as a consequence, a new approach has been developed called club convergence (BAUMOL, W.J. 1986; QUAH, D.T. 1995). Its key argument is that the convergence occurs inside of groups of countries or sub-national regions (convergence clubs), while the inequalities between the groups (clubs) have a growing tendency.

This process is described as polarisation emphasising the spatial clustering (concentration process) of economic growth and it is viewed as a different phenomenon from inequality. Accordingly, regional polarisation is estimated by considering density functions for the distribution of GDP per capita. Important empirical evidence was brought for the existence and persistence of regional polarisation in the form of convergence clubs at the top and bottom of income distribution, while the middle-class clubs are vanishing (QUAH, D.T. 1997; CASTRO, J.W. 2003; SMETKOWSKI, M. and WÓJCIK, P. 2012). Another major contribution of this new approach is the possibility of multiple equilibrium and



steady-states to which similar economies converge. However, empirical studies in club convergence have brought new evidence that poorer regions are trapped in clubs or, with other words in a group of regions at a lower level of development and with no chances of a way out (MORA, T. 2005; BENEDEK, J. and KOCZISZKY, GY. 2015).

### The evaluation of different theoretical approaches on inequalities

In this section, we argue that the above-discussed theoretical approaches can be grouped according to key assumptions and findings (*Table 1*).

1. A group of approaches largely relies on hard production factors (capital, labour, technological progress) in explaining the evolution of regional economic inequalities. The traditional growth theories (neoclassical, post-Keynesian and the export base theories), the new growth theories and the NEG constitute this group. In these approaches multiplier effects – generated by investments, imports or exports – contribute to growth transmission largely and to amplifying inequalities. The weak points of these theories

are related to their assumption of economic equilibrium and also the imperative of a rational and balanced spatial distribution of economy as there is no equilibrium situation, in which the interests of each economic actor are considered (PLUMMER, P.S. 2000). Thus, development and growth cannot be equal in all regions, and the steady-state situations are relative and unstable. Finally, the idea of long-term convergence of growth and inequalities between countries and sub-national regions was refuted by empirical studies.

2. The second group of approaches – historical and sociological theories – embraced non-economic or ‘soft’ factors in their explanations for regional inequalities, such as the availability of services, quality of housing, accessibility, regional structure, characteristics of local or regional markets, the role of local administration, quality of life, quality of workforce. This group fills the gap opened up by quantitative models relying on ‘hard’ development factors, which cannot explain the diversity of regional development paths satisfactorily. They focus largely on the local perspective of development in which, the region appears as a strong entity with endogenous capacities for growth. Their weak point is related to the multi-stage de-

*Table 1. Theoretical approaches to regional inequalities in comparison*

Group of theories	Theoretical approach	Tendency of regional inequalities	Reasons for increasing/diminishing inequalities
Traditional models of economic growth	Neoclassic Post-Keynesianism Export base	Diminishing Diminishing Diminishing	Production factor mobility and diminishing marginal product of capital Multiplier effects, spatial effects of investments Export activities
Sociological theories	Social inequality and marginalisation	Growing	Capitalism, new international division of labour, the logic of capital accumulation
Historical theories	Historical approaches	Diminishing	Reversed polarisation, integration
Theories of economic and spatial polarisation	Polarisation World-system, dependency	Growing Persisting or growing	Dominance of centripetal forces Polarisation effects, position in the world economy
New theories on unequal development and growth	Endogenous growth New economic geography	Persisting or growing Persisting or growing	Regional concentration of knowledge and technology Transport costs, spatial concentration of industry, mobility of industrial workforce

Source: Authors' own compilation.

velopment model which should be passed by every region in order to obtain a higher development status. For this, the model cannot explain deviations from this general trend generated by structural factors (differences in the internal structure of the regions), historical paths (historical accidents) or by different regional adaptation capacities.

3. The third group of approaches is represented by polarisation, world-system, and dependency theories representing a structuralist position, as they place cores and peripheries in the context of a globally overarching system. They are anchored in global processes, where the macroeconomic and political structures and the positioning of the region in the historically emerged core-periphery system determine regional development. Thus, the conditions of economic growth for peripheral regions are defined by the domination of core regions resulting in a core-periphery international division of labour with different rates of accumulation.

Summarising the reviewed literature, we can conclude the followings:

- Polarisation is linked to the complementary notion of convergence/ divergence;
- It is focused on space-dynamics, where some regions rise while others fall;
- These processes are shaped by economic and social dimensions;
- Polarisation has varying characteristics on different spatial scales, from global to local.

We think, the discussed concepts of polarisation and convergence/divergence provide arguments for a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach in researching spatial inequalities. Like polarisation, the concept of convergence can be viewed as a multi-dimensional process that can be explained as the interaction of economic and social dimensions. The new approach we propose should include the combination of the concepts of polarisation and convergence/divergence and provide a framework for the operationalisation for the empirical research using the tools offered by spatial econometrics. In recent studies (BENEDEK, J. and KOCZISZKY, GY. 2015; BENEDEK, J. *et al.* 2015),

new evidence was provided, that economic and social development in CEE is going hand in hand with growing regional inequalities and polarisation. In addition, the peripheral regions of the CEE at sub-national level seem to be trapped in the 'convergence clubs' of backward regions diverging from the group of economically dynamic regions.

We think, further research in this field can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of polarisation and peripheralisation from a quantitative perspective. However, it is necessary to define the main economic and social dimensions, and to identify the main factors determining polarisation.

Some of the latest studies are also going in this direction (DURO, J.A. 2008; LIARGOVAS, P. and FOTOPOULOS, G. 2009; SMETKOWSKI, M. and WÓJCIK, P. 2012; TSELIOS, V. 2014; LI, G. and FANG, C. 2014; RODRÍGUEZ-POSE, A. and TSELIOS, V. 2015; ROYUELA, V. and GARCÍA, G.A. 2015), proposing a new concept of convergence/divergence, interpreting them as multi-dimensional processes. This contrasts with the established neoclassical and endogenous growth theories still operating with a one-dimensional economic convergence concept.

The multi-dimensional approach to convergence/divergence reflects upon some of the concerns formulated in recent years and reacting to the inadequacy of the concepts and of the instruments used for the measuring regional inequalities – which are still based on the economic dimension of development. Thus, there is a growing recognition of the need for including the social dimension in the analysis of regional inequalities expressing people's desire for a better quality of life and social welfare. The question is highly relevant to the regional policy of the EU, trapped in a simplistic GDP per capita approach to delimiting the regions 'lagging behind', largely neglecting the basic interests of local, regional or even national communities.

One can observe that economic growth often has no significant influence on the income of the households and on the improvement of the social indicators expressing the

quality of life (EASTERLY, W. 1999; RODRÍGUEZ-POSE, A. and TSELIOS, V. 2015). Nevertheless, the research conducted by BECKER, G.S. *et al.* (2005) showed that the income and health inequality trends are decupled at a global scale: while income disparities have a growing tendency, cross-country inequality in different dimensions of health is diminishing (BECKER, G.S. *et al.* 2005). This suggests that social convergence can occur without economic convergence. At the same time, it calls for a regional social policy beside the existing regional policy.

The studies reviewed above refer to a multi-dimensional convergence process at cross-country level and propose a new and alternative methodology for the analysis of convergence and divergence processes. RODRÍGUEZ-POSE, A. and TSELIOS, V. (2015) used Sen's index of social welfare in the European context, while other studies proposed a large set of social indicators for the analysis of social disparities at international level. For instance, more and more the social and demographic components of Human Development Index (e.g. life expectancy, infant mortality, educational enrolment, or the literacy rate) are used to contribute to international comparative studies.

Moreover, studies based on micro level (personal or household) data give accounts of the processes of social convergence in Europe, e.g. RODRÍGUEZ-POSE, A. and TSELIOS, V. (2015), who used microeconomic data of the European ECHP in their analysis. Their main question was whether the absence of a strong convergence in GDP per capita in the EU makes the convergence in social welfare also weak or absent. They have found major social welfare disparities between different regions of Europe, including a clear northern-southern divide. Welfare levels in the southern periphery – covering Greece, Southern Italy, Spain, and Portugal – are typically half of the EU average. In general, regions with similar welfare levels cluster together.

The above methodological innovations provided an empirical contribution to the work of “The Commission on the Measurement of

Economic Performance and Social Progress” that defined the concept of well-being considering the following dimensions: material living standards (income, consumption, wealth), health, education, political representation and governance, social and personal connections, environment, economic and physical insecurity (STIGLITZ, J. *et al.* 2010).

Concerning the results of multi-dimensional convergence studies, there are some important remarks that have to be made. Methodological shortcuts are inevitable, like in the case of one-dimensional studies, which means that the results are highly dependent on the period under research, on the geographical scale and on the used indicators. While the international comparison proved a strong connection between the economic and the social convergence, studies focused on sub-national/regional scale revealed the opposite situation: social convergence has occurred without economic convergence (RODRÍGUEZ-POSE, A. and TSELIOS, V. 2015; ROYUELA, V. and GARCÍA, G.A. 2015). It is worth to consider this last issue, as it suggests that living standards can be improved even in the absence of economic growth or economic convergence. It is in this direction that the “The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress” has formulated as one of its key messages: “...the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being.” (STIGLITZ, J. *et al.* 2010, p. 312).

## Conclusions and future prospects

We can summarise our contribution to the question of convergence and polarisation around two ideas.

1. First, our paper argues that alternative interpretations of convergence are possible, and that this concept can be related to other theoretical approaches than growth theories. Moreover, we have argued for the multidimensional perspective of convergence and divergence that means the combination of

social and economic dimensions is needed to understand the interrelatedness of social and economic factors influencing development. This new approach would enable a more proper operationalisation of the technological factor, taking into account the fact that the reduction of the technological gap needs not only good imitation strategies, but also the development of social capabilities. In addition, the multidimensional approach can properly integrate the contributions of sociology studies focused on the question of social inequalities and social polarisation at the micro scale. They contribute to the rescaling of the research by concentrating on the households as basic research units. This rescaling was strongly supported by the proponents of recent microeconomic studies on household level income inequalities as well. We think, the definition of social polarisation in sociology (as the shrinkage of the middle class) can be adopted in the economic approaches as well and interpreted as the shrinkage process of semi-peripheries. BAUMOL's (1986) idea on convergence clubs strengthens this fact, bringing evidence for a vanishing middle category club, while richer regions are becoming even richer and the poorest ones poorer.

2. Second, we have raised arguments to prove that processes like convergence, divergence, economic growth, spatial mobility and innovation are strongly interrelated. As we mentioned in the introductory part, the concept of polarisation describes the spatial concentration of economic activities and population. At a high intensity of the concentration, core-periphery structures are reinforced, as the core regions attract more capital and population, while peripheries are shrinking both in economic and demographic terms. Thus, polarisation leads to increasing divergence, and this way, to increasing regional inequalities. The opposite process happens when capital and population spreads to peripheries, leading to convergence and diminishing regional inequalities, a process which can be termed as „depolarisation” (an antithesis of polarisation).

However, we have pointed out that economic growth and convergence are not neces-

sarily interrelated, since one can occur without the other. Research on the links between these processes needs more attention in the future. Growth increases economic output and decreases income inequality, but we do not know if the growth in poorer and high-inequality economies would lead to catching up with the richer ones (TSELIOS, V. 2009). All this shows that convergence is a basic concept which reflects on polarisation, regional inequalities, and income distribution.

As suggested by various theoretical approaches (NEG, polarisation theory), we think, there is a need to drive the future attention toward the impact of territorial mobility in both the core and the peripheral regions. We have two major reasons to do so. First, due to the fact that significant financial and political efforts have been made to provide certain public services in remote areas, the focus of the analysis should be on how the spatially differentiated migration processes affect the population thresholds necessary to assure public services like education, health care etc. Second, the focus of future studies should be on the agglomeration effects generated by the migration processes in core regions, such as the capital or the regional urban centres – revealing the turning points at which, population agglomeration is not able to generate positive effects anymore and is likely to turn into dispersion.

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# Changing Ethnic Patterns of the Carpatho–Pannonian Area from the Late 15<sup>th</sup> until the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century

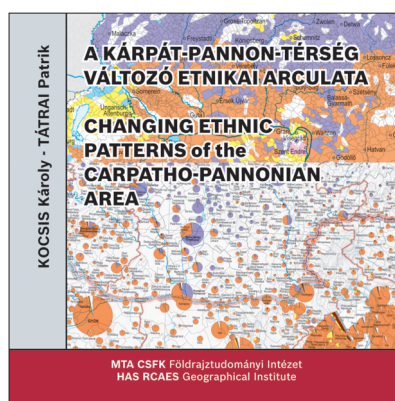
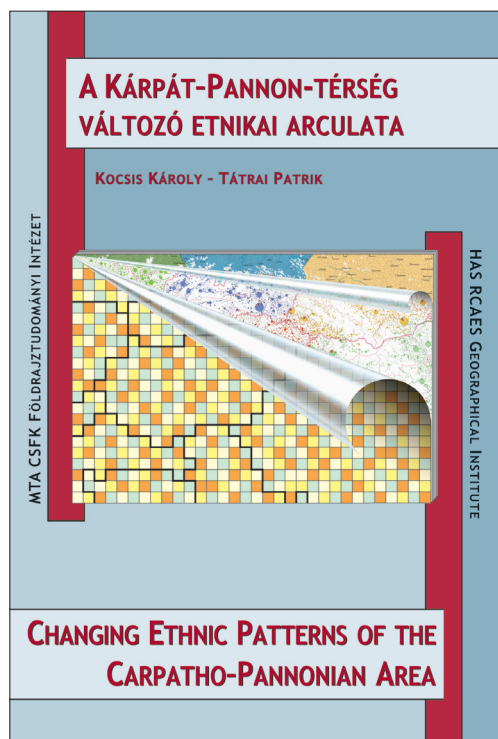
Edited by: KÁROLY KOCSIS and PATRIK TÁTRAI

*Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences  
Budapest, 2013*

This is a collection of maps that visually introduces the changing ethnic patterns of the ethnically, religiously, culturally unique and diverse Carpathian Basin and its neighbourhood, the Carpatho-Pannonian area.

The Hungarian and English volume consist of three structural units. On the main map, pie charts depict the ethnic structure of the settlements in proportion to the population based on census data of the millennium. In the supplementary maps, changes of the ethnic structure can be seen at nine dates (in 1495, 1784, 1880, 1910, 1930, 1941, 1960, 1990 and 2001). The third unit of the work is the accompanying text, which outlines the ethnic trends of the past five hundred years in the studied area.

The antecedent of this publication is the „series of ethnic maps” published by the Geographical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from the middle of the 1990's, which displayed each of the regions of the Carpathian Basin (in order of publication: Transylvania, Slovakia, Transcarpathia, Pannonian Croatia, Vojvodina, Transmura Region, Burgenland, Hungary). This work represents, on the one hand, the updated and revised version of these areas, and, on the other hand, regions beyond the Carpathian Basin not included on previous maps. Thus, the reader can browse ethnic data of some thirty thousand settlements in different maps.



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## Contextualising regional policy for territorial cohesion in Central and Eastern Europe

BRADLEY LOEWEN<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This conceptual paper discusses key instruments for territorial cohesion in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) from a comparative historical analytical perspective amidst the neoliberalisation of EU Regional Policy, which has implications for the production and reinforcement of spatial inequalities in regional development. The neoliberalisation processes unfolding in the different political-institutional contexts of CEE have implications for the movement, transformation and effectiveness of policies such as Regional Policy, complicating the holistic understanding of policy effects. Increasingly neoliberal regional policies across Europe, and in the different path dependent political-institutional contexts of CEE in particular, raise questions about the effectiveness of Regional Policy to achieve territorial cohesion. Comparative historical analysis provides a method of inquiry into path dependent processes shaping institutions and affecting policy outcomes, and is therefore a useful approach for conceptualising regional political-institutional contexts and their implications for Regional Policy. Operational Programmes encompassed in national strategic documents from the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary over three programming periods are examined as the key instruments for the implementation of Regional Policy, the comparison of which reveals a difference in perspectives towards the common EU goals of competitiveness and growth as a means of achieving territorial cohesion. The research thus points to the need for deeper comparative understanding of the political-institutional contexts in the three countries in order to identify factors of effective policies and to tailor effective policy solutions to specific regional contexts, a task to be advanced in future studies of Regional Policy and political-institutional contexts of CEE.

**Keywords:** regional policy, cohesion policy, territorial cohesion, neoliberalism, Central and Eastern Europe, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary

### Introduction

The post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), sharing similar socio-political and economic histories, have developed along dramatically different trajectories than their Western neighbours that, even after a decade of European Union (EU) membership, is revealed by large disparities in economic productivity and living standards (ESPON 2014)<sup>2</sup>. European Regional Policy,

primarily influenced by Cohesion Policy and its related funds, has aimed to lead Member States towards ‘territorial cohesion,’ loosely defined here as multi-scalar balanced territorial development. Territorial cohesion is also associated with “territorial interdependency and solidarity, which can include urban-rural or productive-residential dimensions” (FALUDI, A. and PEYRONY, J. 2011, p. 5) and relatively new forms of multi-level governance. Despite reiterations between programming

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periods, Cohesion Policy has convergence as its primary objective – focusing investment in less developed regions – along with complementary objectives spanning economic and social aspects of regional competitiveness. Altogether, these objectives aim to strengthen and support solidarity and a polycentric spatial development in the EU.

The year 2014 marks a milestone as an anniversary year and as the beginning of a new programming period for Regional Policy guided by the Europe 2020 strategy for “smart, specialised and inclusive growth” (CEC 2010a). As member states conclude their Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes (OPs) for the 2014–2020 period, it is a timely moment to take stock of how Regional Policy has progressed and how discourses have shaped the recent policy-making agenda and implementation. After a critical review of territorial cohesion and Regional Policy since the accession of CEE countries to the EU, key policy documents are contextualised for the cases of the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary across three programming periods. A discussion emerges about the potentials for Regional Policy to support territorial cohesion and thereby tackle spatial inequalities in regional development in the three countries, and the need for deeper understanding of political-institutional contexts in order to tailor context-specific regional policies for this purpose.

### **Territorial cohesion, spatial inequalities in regional development and neoliberalisation of regional policy**

Political and economic expansion followed by crisis has stimulated much debate over territorial cohesion and Regional Policy during the past decade. A number of high-profile reports concluded that the Lisbon Strategy, of which Cohesion Policy was the primary tool for implementation, failed to close the productivity gap between Europe and industrialised countries (BARCA, F. 2009; CEC 2004, 2005, 2010b). The 2009 financial crisis

had the effect of reversing a long trend of economic convergence between Member States as employment rates plummeted outside of Europe’s traditional core (CEC 2010b, 2014a,b). In CEE sub-national regional polarisation intensified with uneven implications for regional development (SMITH, A. and TIMÁR, J. 2010). Thus, despite earlier progress towards territorial cohesion, there is wide consensus that regional disparities persist across Europe, which can be evidenced by various socioeconomic indicators such as competitiveness (ANNONI, P. and DIJKSTRA, L. 2013), GDP per capita (EUROSTAT 2014), and human development (HARDEMAN, S. and DIJKSTRA, L. 2014).

*Figure 1* illustrates the development of GDP per inhabitant in NUTS-2 regions of the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary from 1999 to 2011, showing a sharp contrast between the capital regions and their peripheries, in the cases of Czech Republic and Hungary. The similarity of GDP development across peripheral regions of the Czech Republic and Hungary as well as the whole of Estonia, and the impact of the 2009 financial crisis can also be seen.

The increasing spatial inequalities in regional development in Europe are part of a global trend that, under the current dominant discourse of neoliberal theory, increasingly favours the growth of competitive urban centres at the expense of under-developed and structurally weak regions through processes of centralisation and peripheralisation (LANG, T. 2011), demonstrated above by higher growth rates in the capital regions (including faster ‘catch-up’ in Estonia). While Cohesion Policy has been estimated to have a positive impact on GDP over baseline levels in CEE at the national level (CEC 2014a), regional polarisation continues to be strongly felt in these traditionally peripheral countries. Convergence-divergence tendencies in parallel with polarisation have been detected in CEE NUTS-3 regions from 1990 to 2008, with convergence amongst less productive regions and divergence of more productive regions (MONASTIRIOTIS, V. 2014).

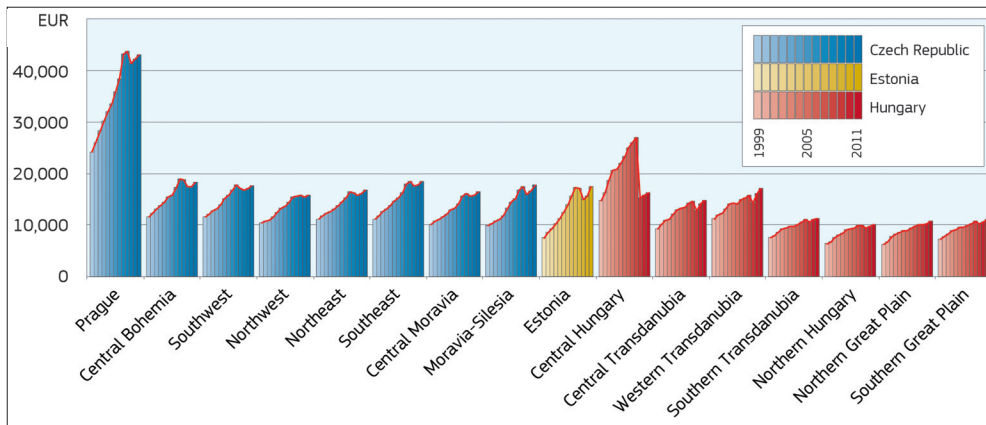


Fig. 1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per inhabitant, at current market prices by NUTS-2 regions, 1999–2011 (ESPON 2013; EUROSTAT 2014)

The Third ESPON Synthesis Report summarising a decade of territorial research, pointed to decreasing territorial cohesion due to the growth of urban cores and the decline of rural areas over the programme's lifetime (ESPON 2014). Furthermore, regions of depletion are more concentrated in CEE, where rural areas are also characterised by a higher role of the primary sector and lower accessibility (COPUS, A. and NOGUERA, J. 2010).

While planning the follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy, the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy to somehow maximise growth while achieving convergence was left unclear (FAROLE, T. *et al.* 2011). Mixed results of the earlier Cohesion Policy prompted reforms for the 2014–2020 period, which, accompanied by the Europe 2020 strategy, would reinforce neoliberal theory as the dominant discourse in European Regional Policy. The milestones of the neoliberalisation of Regional Policy are presented below, beginning with the 1999 European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), in which ministers of Member States first endorsed the concept of territorial cohesion.<sup>3</sup>

Regional Policy has evolved to take on an increasingly neoliberal approach since the concept of territorial cohesion was communicated in its (then) most concrete form in the ESDP as the “balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union” (CEC 1999) along with three objectives: economic and social cohesion; environmental conservation and management; and balanced competitiveness in all regions; each corresponding to one of the three pillars of sustainable development established by the United Nations’ Brundtland Report (WCED 1987). The objectives of territorial cohesion therefore included an aspect of spatial justice, stipulating spatial reconciliation and safeguarding of regional diversity – elements strongly resistant to normative neoliberal principles. Of significance to CEE countries, the ESDP paid particular attention to structural weaknesses in peripheral areas facing diverse development prospects and consisting of diverse relationships and interdependencies.

The key to the sustainable development of rural regions lies in the development of an independent perspective and the discovery of indigeneous potential and the exchange of experience with other regions, but not in the copying of development perspectives for other regions in the EU (CEC 1999, p. 24).

<sup>3</sup> For the current and historical structure of Regional Policy, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/what/investment-policy/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/what/investment-policy/).

Looking towards EU expansion, the ESDP already recognised a “lack of spatial development policies and regional policy instruments and institutions” as well as an absence of regional political and administrative levels in the Accession Countries (i.e. CEE), and, therefore, expected that spatial development processes would not simply replicate those in the traditional core (CEC 1999, p. 49). Critical scholars quickly contested the Europeanisation of spatial planning and the dominance of economic competitiveness put forth in the ESDP (RICHARDSON, T. and JENSEN, O.B. 2000). Nevertheless, as territorial cohesion has been promoted, refined and become more intertwined with neoliberal policy since 1999, the normativity of neoliberal principles has dominated policymaking in peripheral areas and thereby limited the array of policy options available.

In 2003 the highly influential Sapir Report prioritised growth through innovation and institutional transformation as a strategy for Europe (SAPIR, A. *et al.* 2003). The 2009 Barca Report subsequently contributed to a revised Lisbon Strategy, cementing neoliberal values of competitiveness into a place-based strategy (BARCA, F. 2009), and dropping previously implicit notions of spatial justice in territorial cohesion. Moving towards the next programming period, critical scholars called for a context-specific regional policy balanced with increased transparency and fiscal responsibility. On the one hand, COPUS, A. and NOGUERA, J. (2010) offered that for regions to develop their potential, Cohesion Policy should take into account regional conditions associated with narratives of change and local particularities.

The contextualisation of regional policy would necessitate more freedom for regions to deviate from EU and national agendas, especially in CEE where some countries have seen recent recentralisation. On the other hand, FAROLE, RODRÍGUEZ-POSE and STORPER recommended that greater conditionality be extended by the EU in order to avoid the potential problems of a decentralised Cohesion Policy (FAROLE, T. *et al.* 2011). Others called

attention back towards the social dimension to support European integration (LUNDVALL, B.Å. and LORENZ, E. 2012), implying a retreat from neoliberalism. The resulting evolution of Cohesion Policy aligned more closely with Europe 2020, shifting priorities from hard infrastructure to soft innovation capacities and exerting tighter controls over the use of funds (CEC 2014a). Nevertheless, Europe 2020 has been criticised for repeating the structural errors of the Lisbon Strategy (GONZÁLEZ, L. and RUBÉN, C. 2013).

The promotion of territorial cohesion within a neoliberal Regional Policy framework presents a critical contradiction between the place-based approach and the normativity of neoliberal principles, since a common set of neoliberal principles neither finds the same application nor produces the same effects within the path dependent political-institutional contexts of regions. After a decade of capitalism STARK and BRUSZT in their common work published in 2001 described the post-socialist condition in CEE in terms of a “diversity of capitalisms” that had emerged in path dependent contexts (p. 1131), recalling JESSOP’s “actually existing neoliberalisms” (STARK, D. and BRUSZT, L. 2001; JESSOP, B. 2002). In the wake of the 2009 financial crisis, BRENNER, PECK and THEODORE postulated that a variegated neoliberalism resulting from successive waves of crisis-induced neoliberal restructuring unfolds unevenly across space and produces “new forms of geo-institutional differentiation” or “inherited politico-institutional arrangements” (BRENNER, N. *et al.* 2010a, p. 331).

The same authors found that prototypical neoliberal policy transfer between states produces a qualitatively transformed policy in different political-institutional contexts (BRENNER, N. *et al.* 2010b). Therefore, the similarities amongst CEE countries should not be taken for granted when it comes to neoliberalisation processes nor the application of supranational strategies, the effectiveness of which can vary. BARCA, McCANN and RODRÍGUEZ-POSE argued that the place-based approach that took hold in the EU during the

reformed Lisbon Strategy was conducive to the many existing path-dependent institutional contexts (BARCA, F. *et al.* 2012).

Nevertheless, the increasingly homogeneous neoliberal regional policy still does not take these into account. A diverse array of appropriate policy responses corresponding to path dependent neoliberal contexts should, therefore, be expected in CEE rather than the narrowing perspective of a (non-existent) pure neoliberalism.

Critical scholars have offered insights into the rise of neoliberalism in other domains of regional development such as New Economic Geography (NEG) and New Regionalism (NR), which are believed to contribute to a depoliticisation of spatial development and the reproduction of uneven spatial development, increasing the vulnerability of lagging regions to the global financial system and disarming regions' political ability to respond to exogenous events such as the financial crisis (HADJIMICHALIS, C. 2011; HADJIMICHALIS, C. and HUDSON, R. 2014). Such views incorporated into the research community made it difficult to distinguish progressive from regressive policy (HADJIMICHALIS, C. and HUDSON, R. 2014). In 2004, the neoliberal normativity of the creative economy agendas of place competition and promotion were already being recognised (GIBSON, C. and KLOCKER, N. 2004), and academics have since become intermediaries of creative economies for regional development, unconsciously and uncritically reproducing normative elements (GIBSON, C. 2015).

Denial of the problem of spatial inequalities in regional development, therefore, extends from experts and academics to the European Commission, whose evaluations of the Lisbon Strategy and Cohesion Policy interpreted the effects of the financial crisis as the result of macro-economic imbalances and competitiveness problems (CEC 2010b, 2013), without recognising the problematic socio-economic effects of entrenched spatial inequalities and peripheralisation processes accumulating over decades, calling into question intra-European power relations and national interests in the setting of EU policy.

While regional diversity is promoted in Regional Policy, the rhetoric remains limited to the neoliberal narrative of competitiveness and growth that, coupled with Europe 2020, restricts policy options and could work against territorial cohesion by further promoting spatial inequalities in regional development. To understand how these concepts have been represented at the regional level and used to address regional particularities, it is necessary to look within individual Member States. National documents for Regional Policy (including Operational Programmes) from the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary are next compared to differentiate between national perspectives.

### **Comparative analysis: Regional Policy in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary**

As the case has been made above for decreasing territorial cohesion in CEE countries, attention will next be directed to Regional Policy as applied in the CEE context to ascertain similarities and differences in the political-institutional contexts in which Regional Policy is delivered. The above mentioned critiques of neoliberalism in Regional Policy and related fields point to hidden differences in national contexts and the need to investigate beyond the normative elements of EU Regional Policy, as reproduced in national and regional policies, in order to uncover national discourses and political-institutional contexts with implications for policy effectiveness.

Programmes in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary are investigated from a comparative analytical approach along the lines of Comparative Historical Analysis within the field of New Institutionalism, which examines a small number of cases against a theoretical backdrop in order to challenge prior beliefs about the cases (GOLDSTONE, J.A. 2003), focusing on processes over time and the use of systematic and contextualised comparison (MAHONEY, J. and RUESCHEMEYER, D. 2003).

The three country cases herein are often grouped together as 'post-socialist', thereby



suppressing notions of difference, and are recipients of EU policy intended for homogeneous application across Member States. The forthcoming analysis examines the guiding national strategic documents of Regional Policy from three programming periods, encompassing Operational Programmes, to uncover differences between the three countries that also have potential implications for policy effectiveness.

#### *Pre-accession support, Regional Policy and Operational Programmes*

Agenda 2000 laid out the EU's enlargement strategy in response to a high volume of membership applications from CEE including the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary (CEC 1997). Cohesion was envisioned to be of great importance in an enlarged Union, and funding through the PHARE programme and Agenda 2000 prioritised upgrading transportation and environmental infrastructure and institutions, investments that were considered vital for the realisation of political and economic advantages in an enlarged Union. Therefore, the process of territorial cohesion with a long-term focus on outward-looking competitiveness was in motion even before the 2004 enlargement. Following their accession, financial support was provided by Structural and Cohesion Funds, which have continued to drive investments for territorial cohesion in Member States through Regional Policy.

Operational Programmes (OPs) are viewed here as the implementing instruments of Regional Policy and for delivering Cohesion Policy into national contexts. The Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary were funded for OPs for the remainder of the 2000–2006 (i.e. 2004–2006), 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 (on-going) periods. The strategies and thematic contents of OPs can be identified by examining their EU-negotiated parent national strategic documents for the allocation of investment funds. In 2004–2006, Community Support Frameworks (CSFs) outlined five OPs in each of the Czech Republic and

Hungary. Estonia had a single national OP for comparison. In 2007–2013, the number of OPs (not to mention cross-border co-operations) proliferated: six national and eight regional OPs in the Czech Republic (including one national and one regional Objective 2 Programme); two regional OPs in Estonia; and seven national and seven regional OPs in Hungary; all of which stemmed from the EU-negotiated documents, National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs). The 2014–2020 period was simplified, with only national OPs in the roster (again, excluding cross-border programmes), developed under the guiding national Partnership Agreements (PAs). *Table 1* presents the instruments reviewed in the three-country comparison.

#### *Development of Regional Policy in national contexts*

The following sections summarise and compare Regional Policy programmes between the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary. In the 2004–2006, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 programming periods the three countries shared a similar economic situation of being small, open and export-oriented economies in the context of increased global trade liberalisation, with implications for regional disparities. The objectives across periods have been fairly continuous and the content of programmes across periods differs to a very little extent, in accordance with the reproduction of EU policy elements. Nevertheless, the comparison suggests some differentiation between the country perspectives as well as some convergence of these perspectives moving towards the 2014–2020 period, possibly due to the streamlining influence of Europe 2020.

*Table 2* highlights key principles in national strategies in Regional Policy instruments, thereby demonstrating variation in the representation of neoliberal elements, and is followed by further description of key messages from each country. This raises the questions of how these variations may be connected to the successful or unsuccessful transfer of EU Regional Policy into the national contexts



Table 1. *Regional Policy instruments reviewed in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary from the 2004–2006, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 programming periods*

Programming period	Instrument	Czech Republic	Estonia	Hungary
2004–2006	Community Support Framework	Yes	No	Yes
	Operational Programme (National)	5	1	5
	Operational Programme (Multiregional)		–	–
	Operational Programme (Regional)	1	–	–
2007–2013	National Strategic Reference Framework	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Operational Programme (National)	6	2	7
	Operational Programme (Regional)	8	–	7
2014–2020	Partnership Agreement	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Operational Programme (National)	7	1	6

in CEE, and what the subsequent effects of regional policies on spatial inequalities and territorial cohesion might be.

### *Czech Republic*

The 2004–2006 strategy of the Czech Republic was described as “sustainability based on competitiveness” (MMR 2003, p. 61), supporting objectives of the Lisbon Strategy while focusing on the country’s relative performance within the EU for achieving territorial cohesion. Despite regional disparities, achieving sustainable economic development depended on taking advantage of the Prague agglomeration and its spill-over effects, developing other major growth poles, and upgrading transport infrastructure as a precondition for competitiveness and growth: “the main aim of the Structural Funds is ... to finance interventions which can be expected to have a positive effect on long-run productivity gains and employment creation” (p. 55). Horizontal objectives including environ-

mental standards, social inclusion and balanced development of regions were included in each OP. The latter objective addressing territorial cohesion was described as “decreasing the negative impacts of unbalanced economic growth” (p. 68), thereby tackling the problem of spatial inequalities.

In the 2007–2013 NSRF attention was drawn to the risks of diminishing global cost competitiveness, lagging productivity and institutional barriers impeding the business climate (MMR 2007). Cohesion was represented both between regions and in relation to the EU, which continued the existing contradiction between convergence and competitiveness objectives: “There are also priorities in place with objectives in compliance with the Lisbon Strategy in support of the competitiveness of regions with the highest growth potential, whose stimulation will contribute to the CR’s convergence to the European average” (p. 63), again relying on the economic core to lift all regions, which could intensify spatial inequalities. Nevertheless, growing regional disparities in unemployment were

Table 2. *Variations of neoliberal elements in Regional Policy instruments in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary from the 2004–2006, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 programming periods*

Programming period	Czech Republic	Estonia	Hungary
2004–2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Economic competitiveness through productivity and low cost strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Economic competitiveness through technology and skills development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Socio-economic development through increased employment and social inclusion</li> </ul>
2007–2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Economic competitiveness through upgrading skills and knowledge;</li> <li>– Transition from low-cost strategy;</li> <li>– Promotion of growth pole producing spillover effects;</li> <li>– Removal of barriers to economic development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Benefit from global economic integration;</li> <li>– Knowledge and entrepreneurialism through communication and mobility;</li> <li>– Transition from low-cost to knowledge-based economy;</li> <li>– Global attractiveness and place competition (e.g. clean environment);</li> <li>– Promotion of polycentric urban structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased employment through skills development;</li> <li>– Social stability and efficient delivery of social services;</li> <li>– Increased territorial cohesion through development of regional growth poles;</li> <li>– Improved accessibility through transport infrastructure.</li> </ul>
2014–2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improved functioning of labour market;</li> <li>– High quality business environment;</li> <li>– Support to SMEs;</li> <li>– Transition to non-price competitiveness;</li> <li>– Social inclusion including employment services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased productivity replacing employment;</li> <li>– R&amp;D capitalisation, venture capital, foreign direct investment;</li> <li>– Efficient use of resources;</li> <li>– Transition to low carbon economy;</li> <li>– Global connectivity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Fiscal stability and structural reforms incl. social services;</li> <li>– Necessity of economic growth from all investments.</li> </ul>

noted, as well as the problems of transport deficiencies and bottlenecks, e.g. in the TEN-T network, considered to hamper flows between the East and West due to the Czech Republic's central position in the EU.

Spatial polarisation and fragmentation continued to be an inhibiting factor to the development of lower-order growth poles and a cohesive territorial development. Regional trajectories covered a range from "undergoing rapid development" to "having low growth dynamics" and being "on the decline" (p. 27). Business incentives to SMEs were targeted to help this large segment of the economy achieve its growth potential, especially in underdeveloped regions. Social cohesion through inclusion and improvements to public administration were also specified.

The 2014–2020 Partnership Agreement was designed for maximum coherence with the Europe 2020 Strategy (with associated targets) and related national policies. Previous priorities were renewed, with the strategic objectives of "developing a high quality business environment" and "providing an inclusive society" (MMR 2014, p. 118). Increasing the quality of education, core infrastructure and public institutions were listed as conditions for renewed economic growth, and investments were targeted to structurally weak regions to address traditional industries and growing long term social exclusion.

### *Estonia*

Estonia's single OP for the 2004–2006 period focused on human resources development for economic competitiveness, but with a distinct specialisation on ICT. Skills and development was addressed by matching educational opportunities to demands of the labour market. Disparities within the region were de-

scribed in terms of GDP contributions between Tallinn and other counties (NUTS-3 regions), demonstrating a strong core-periphery duality. Without a CSF, Estonia's programme aligned with its own National Development Plan, and participation in Regional Policy was comparatively simple. Nevertheless, *ex post* evaluations found that the "centralised implementation and prioritisation of goals left the regional perspective as a subsidiary aim" (Applica-Ismeri Europa-wiiw 2010, p. 3). Setting targets within the NUTS-2 region was not required, so the OP was more free to pursue national interests, of which spatial polarisation was still a concern.

The 2007–2013 NSRF projected a global and entrepreneurial spirit of Estonia, poised to benefit from increasing global trade liberalisation, as its position as a small, open and integrated economy was firmly established. The headline objective of "fast and sustainable development" (Republic of Estonia 2007, p. 65) aimed to promote open mobility and communication for knowledge transfer and entrepreneurialism: "...we also have an opportunity to win from the global expansion of labour market assumed that people return to Estonia richer with one [*sic*] experience" (p. 15). Technological advancement and opportunities for foreign direct investment were viewed as a means to escape its diminishing role as a low-cost labour provider: "the fast and expansive adoption of new technologies ... and updating of business and operational models ... are extremely important" (p. 18). Neoliberal notions of attractiveness and place competition were also promoted through welfare reforms, environmental sustainability, and cultural potentials of the periphery. "Decreasing domestic regional balance" (p. 24) from uneven economic growth and urban-rural migration was addressed through promoting the development of a polycentric urban structure, elevating the representation of territorial cohesion in the national strategy. Nevertheless, the capital region continued to be a major driver of economic restructuring and attraction, entrenching spatial inequalities.

In the 2014–2020 PA Estonia looks for increased macro-economic stability following the global credit crunch to reduce its vulnerability as an open economy (Republic of Estonia 2014). The country is preparing for a nominal decline in employment due to an aging population, which determines its economic strategy – "economic growth can only be driven by productivity and investments supporting it" (p. 6) – and focuses on high value-added levels of the economy, capitalisation of R&D, attraction of venture capital, and more efficient use of natural resources. Estonia further reinforces its international outlook by prioritising global connectivity for economic growth: "Participation in global value chains unavoidably requires the existence of high quality connections," and, "the impact of flight connections on GDP growth can range from 4–7%" (p. 20).

The strategy points to decreased albeit large regional economic disparities from 2005–2012, suggesting positive movement for territorial cohesion – "regional differences in GDP relative to population between Harju and Tartu Counties ... and all other regions ... have decreased" (p. 42) – although significant internal migration to the core urban areas of Tallinn and Tartu have occurred since the 2008 financial crisis (RAAGMAA, G. and STEAD, D. 2013). The strategy states that "all regions located outside of the urban areas of Tallinn and Tartu need additional attention in accordance with their specific problems," (p. 45) evidenced by limited employment and commuting possibilities.

### *Hungary*

The Hungarian CSF highlighted the intensification of pre-existing regional disparities arising from market liberalisation and economic restructuring (Republic of Hungary, 2003). On the whole, the strategy demonstrated a strong social perspective amidst stable political and economic conditions, positioning human development as the primary means towards achieving territorial cohesion:

“Hungary must give renewed policy focus to strengthening its overall level of development in order to move towards convergence with the level of the socio-economic development of the EU” (p. 68). The inclusion of “socio-” in this overall strategy is palpable. “Improving the use of human resources,” (p. 68) took the second place objective, although it was also a prominent strategy for the first objective, economic competitiveness. Lower-order objectives included environment, basic infrastructure and balanced territorial development. Thus, the dominant theme of the CSF was inclusive human development to improve employment, which suffered due to substantial withdrawal from the labour market. The presence of high quality educational institutions was seen as a potential resource for improving employment in the less developed regions of the East, albeit amidst struggling R&D capacities characterised by lack of knowledge transfer, out-dated technologies and underinvestment. Other social topics covered, such as healthcare, inclusion and equal opportunity, demonstrated a strongly social perspective.

The 2007–2013 programme once again called for growth through increased employment with an enhanced global economic dimension, with a condition of respecting social values: “[We] need a brave and creative economic development concept embracing issues of employment as well that respects both the satisfaction of social demands and macro-economic stability” (Republic of Hungary 2007, p. 1). In this way, economic performance was secondary and conditional with respect to social cohesion, a resistant stance to the neoliberal norm. Cohesion and Structural Funds were framed as an opportunity for the “renewal of society” (p. 1). Institutional reform was framed for the efficient delivery of social welfare rather than economic development. Regional disparities and internal contradictions were still high, and spatial polarisation was addressed through support for developing regional growth poles and harnessing endogenous potentials to develop comparative advantages.

Following a period of fiscal consolidation after the financial crisis – itself necessarily a neoliberal condition for economic growth – Hungary considered itself well-positioned to benefit from Cohesion and Structural Funds (Republic of Hungary 2013). The 2014–2020 PA continued to focus on fiscal policy for strong macro-economic conditions through targeted actions: “[These] funds can only result in additional economic growth in Hungary if they are used in a more targeted and simple manner compared to the previous period” (p. 10), but retreated somewhat from the markedly social stance of previous programmes: “The development programmes which are not directly of an economic nature must be engineered in a way that they can ... contribute to the goal of growth” (p. 11). Therefore, the PA marks a shift and perhaps exemplifies the most drastic neoliberalisation of policy of the three countries studied.

Regarding spatial polarisation it was believed that both old and new processes producing regional disparities, including micro-regional, needed support at a lower level than NUTS-2 to be successful. The resulting programme exhibited a broader, streamlined set of development priorities corresponding to Europe 2020, showing growing similarity to the other countries reviewed. Low employment was still one of the most serious concerns hampering growth.

### *Contextualising further research*

The above sheds light on variations that can be produced within the EU streamlining process that appears to impose common policy onto different political-institutional contexts, raising further questions about these national contexts and their abilities to transfer policy. The content of the national documents reviewed is admittedly light and optimistic, especially considering that over the three programming periods, regional inequalities in CEE have worsened and the European economy has faced its biggest challenges in decades. Nevertheless, the strategies outlined

therein demonstrate variation in the pursuit of competitiveness and growth amidst increasingly neoliberal supranational policy.

The Czech Republic's focus on catching up with European-average productivity through cost-competitiveness and reduced barriers to business contrasts with Hungary's focus on increasing labour market participation through developing human resources and Estonia's leap into advanced global niche markets. Such variations in the approaches to the normative principles of competitiveness and growth recall the previously discussed notions of 'actually existing' and 'variegated' neoliberalisms (JESSOP, B. 2002; BRENNER, N. *et al.* 2010a), and suggest the possibility of further variations – that should be investigated – once Regional Policy is put into national and regional contexts. RAAGMAA and STEAD wrote that after accession CEE countries practiced a combination of previous behaviour, new EU rules, and local agendas leading to double standards in policy-making (RAAGMAA, G. and STEAD, D. 2013).

Furthermore, MONASTIRIOTIS stated that national economic contexts play a role in the convergence process (MONASTIRIOTIS, V. 2014). Therefore, the path dependent political-institutional structures in CEE almost certainly carry remnants of previous regimes more than two decades after liberalisation that are influencing emerging forms of neoliberalism and have implications for Regional Policy, territorial cohesion, and spatial inequalities in regional development.

Moving forward, it becomes critical to further understand specific political-institutional contexts alongside policies in order to address some key questions raised by this paper: *How has Regional Policy been transferred to CEE and transformed through the transfer process? How has the transferred policy addressed the EU concept of cohesion and real spatial inequalities in different national contexts? And ultimately, What factors of regional policy are particularly effective for promoting territorial cohesion in the CEE?* The answers to these questions will help to elucidate MONASTIRIOTIS' relationships between national economic contexts and convergence in order to form

specific policy recommendations for CEE. Moreover, the identification of key factors of successful regional policies in CEE can benefit Regional Policy as a whole by further developing the place-based approach and subsequently informing new iterations of policy instruments.

## Conclusion

The preceding comparative analysis has highlighted different national perspectives in the cases of the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary towards the neoliberal principles of competitiveness and growth promoted by Regional Policy. Critical scholars have responded to the neoliberalisation of Regional Policy and its negative effects by suggesting alternatives, from a re-politicisation and democratisation of policy to a reconsideration of discarded alternate forms of regionalism (e.g. welfare regionalism) (HADJIMICHALIS, C. and HUDSON, R. 2014), or a refocusing of policy from convergence to underdevelopment (FAROLE, T. *et al.* 2011). In any case, a deeper comparative understanding of national and regional political-institutional contexts is required to move beyond the neoliberal rhetoric of Regional Policy that is reproduced in national documents, and to ultimately determine the factors of successful regional policies for context-specific policy recommendations, of which this study took a first step.

PECK, THEODORE and BRENNER argued that critical analysis needs to extend beyond concerns about what policies achieve, "to consider the manner in which they move, how cross-jurisdictional reform trajectories are constructed, and how the over-all pattern of policy making varies over time and space" (PECK, J. *et al.* 2012, p. 278). It will be critical to consider these aspects in the quest for contextualised regional policymaking in CEE. Comparative Historical Analysis within the field of New Institutionalism offers an approach conducive to this task. Despite an accumulation of knowledge during the



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# Ukraine in Maps

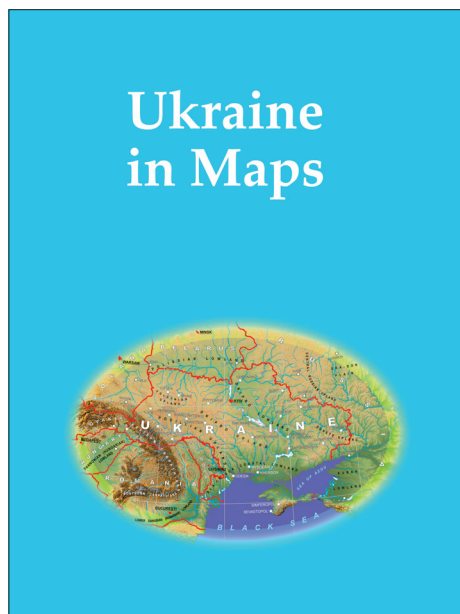
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*Institute of Geography National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine  
Geographical Research Institute Hungarian Academy of Sciences.  
Kyiv–Budapest, 2008, 148 p.*

Since the disintegration of the USSR, the Western world has shown an ever-growing interest in Ukraine, its people and its economy. As the second-largest country in Europe, Ukraine has a strategic geographical position at the crossroads between Europe and Asia. It is a key country for the transit of energy resources from Russia and Central Asia to the European Union, which is one reason why Ukraine has become a priority partner in the neighbourhood policy of the EU. Ukraine has pursued a path towards the democratic consolidation of statehood, which encompasses vigorous economic changes, the development of institutions and integration into European and global political and economic structures. In a complex and controversial world, Ukraine is building collaboration with other countries upon the principles of mutual understanding and trust, and is establishing initiatives aimed at the creation of a system that bestows international security.

This recognition has prompted the Institute of Geography of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv) and the Geographical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Budapest) to initiate cooperation, and the volume entitled “Ukraine in Maps” is the outcome of their joint effort. The intention of this publication is to make available the results of research conducted by Ukrainian and Hungarian geographers, to the English-speaking

public. This atlas follows in the footsteps of previous publications from the Geographical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Similar to the work entitled *South Eastern Europe in Maps* (2005, 2007), it includes 64 maps, dozens of figures and tables accompanied by an explanatory text, written in a popular, scientific manner. The book is an attempt to outline the geographical setting and geopolitical context of Ukraine, as well as its history, natural environment, population, settlements and economy. The authors greatly hope that this joint venture will bring Ukraine closer to the reader and make this neighbouring country to the European Union more familiar, and consequently, more appealing.



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## The Land of Storms and the region where the country's heart beats: changing images of peripherality in Hungary

PÉTER BALOGH<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Processes of peripheralisation have over the past years been studied from structuralist and discursive angles alike. There is at the same time a growing awareness that the two need to be studied together. This paper makes an attempt by showing how socio-material and discursive processes can co-constitute centre-periphery relations, on the example of Hungarian regions. Particular focus is given to Békés County as well as to Central Hungary. The empirical sources consist of sociographic books and popular scientific articles written mostly by geographers. The former show that images of peripheral areas have significantly altered over time. While the "Land of Storms" – an epithet associated with Békés County – for instance has typically stood for toughness and combat-readiness up until the 1950s, it has been connected more with passivity and tardiness since the 1980s. Despite the changing nature of these images they have curiously always been attributed to the region's peripherality, even though a rising spirit for instance has not been a typical feature of peripheries in Hungary. The analysis of popular scientific articles reveals that they are usually written from the centre's perspective, targeting the centre's audience. Further, certain places are peripheralised by being depicted as forgotten or remote; the natural endowments of rural and sparsely populated areas are not rarely exoticised and romanticised. Such descriptions may make so-called peripheries more interesting for readers (in the centres), yet they also maintain old images of such areas that can considerably affect their development potentials.

**Keywords:** peripherality, images, discourses, literature, film, popular science, regional development, Békés County

### Introduction

Over the past years the intensifying processes of peripheralisation have been studied from political economic (SMITH, A. and TIMÁR, J. 2010; NAGY, G. *et al.* 2012), structural-territorial (PÉNZES, J. 2013), hinterland development (*cf.* TIMÁR, J. and KOVÁCS, Z. 2009), and discursive angles (see below). There is at the same time an emerging body of literature that tries to connect the material with the discursive (BEETZ, S. 2008; LANG, T. 2012). This paper makes such an attempt by showing how socio-material and discursive processes can co-constitute centre-periphery relations in the case of Hungarian regions and places.

While considering a number of examples, particular attention is paid to Békés County, often regarded as one of the most peripheral parts of the country. This and other regions' relations and positions are considered not least vis-à-vis the (administrative) region of Central Hungary and especially the capital city Budapest. The particular questions that the paper will address are: What kind of notions and images are typically produced for so-called peripheral areas, and why? How can these affect public notions of such places and thereby their development chances?

The paper is also making an attempt at empirical novelty. Earlier studies on peripherality discourses and labels have focused on media images (AVRAHAM, E. and FIRST,

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A. 2006; ERIKSSON, M. 2008), spatial development plans (e.g. LANG, T. 2012), or semantic elements (MEYER, F. and MIGGELBRINK, J. 2013). To the best of my knowledge, few or no scholars of peripherality have specifically targeted (classic) literature, popular science, and movies as primary sources. Yet, given their widespread and popular character such materials might prove to be a key in finding the roots of shapers of public notions of places here dealt with. Hence, in this investigation I made use of the following two main groups of empirical material.

On the one hand, non-fiction books as well as films were chosen that deal with rural and peripheral areas in Hungary and especially in Békés County. Here I used 8–9 recent and older sources that remain relevant. The second group of empirical sources consists mainly of articles in popular but still demanding publications, especially in *A Földgömb*, the popular scientific journal of the Hungarian Geographical Society. While some of the information may be exaggerated for marketing purposes, important data can be found on this magazine on the publisher's website (Heiling Média Kft, 2015).

We learn that *A Földgömb* is one of the most popular scientific magazines in Hungary, reporting on „spectacular regions, their inhabitants, and little-known environments...”. It is issued in 21,700 copies ten times annually, and has over 6,000 subscribers and around 70,000 readers. The readership shall consist of both men and women aged between 18–55 years, typically decision- as well as opinion-makers, with secondary or tertiary education (with over 40% of subscribers holding a doctoral title). Also important, „it is a unique feature of the readership to read almost every article; with subscribers collecting the 100-page magazine, meaning they return to older copies and re-read the articles” (*ibid*).

Further, a free online version of *A Földgömb* also exists, suggesting it is even more widely read and available to a broader readership. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that very old copies of popular scientific magazines are rarely read, so my selected time range is much

shorter here (than with classic literary texts) – all articles are from the 2000s. I chose 13–14 contributions in this category, most of which dealing with various Hungarian regions.

The sources above are critically analysed, focusing in particular on the ways they portray so-called peripheral and rural areas. I did not adopt a definition of peripherality on my own but relied instead on the sources that themselves use the term periphery as well as closely related concepts such as marginality, and then went on analysing how different writers have been using these notions. Before moving on to the empirical data, some important earlier work in the field of peripherality studies are presented.

### **Peripherality: some conceptual ideas and earlier studies**

As a result of the Westphalian order, peripherality was long seen as a concomitant feature of territoriality and was, thus, rarely problematised. This changed in the 1970s, when peripherality was increasingly studied as a phenomenon and a crucial and unavoidable feature of capitalism (WALLERSTEIN, I. 1974; PETRAS, J.F. 1976). While still a marxist, LEFEBVRE, H. (1974) became a forerunner in changing this by claiming that the periphery's one-sided dependence on the centre is an expression of the socialisation of space (*cf.* SHIELDS, R. 1991). With the cultural and spatial turn (WARE, B. and ARIAS, S. 2009) since the 1980s, peripherality is increasingly seen as a relational process – captured with the concept of peripheralisation – that is constantly under (re)construction and (re)negotiation. PAASTI, A. (1995) showed on the example of different geographic scales in Finland how peripherality is socially constructed rather than given.

At the same time, a relational thinking implies that „peripheries mean different things in different places and for different people” (*ibid*, p. 254–255). In her study on a small Portuguese bordertown, DE OLIVEIRA, S.M. (2002, p. 254) noted that while outsiders may perceive the



local inhabitants as being at the periphery, they themselves do not. Closely related, the relativity of space means that any place on Earth cannot be peripheral on its own but only in relation to another place; for instance a small town vis-à-vis the capital, a tiny impoverished state vis-à-vis a large and powerful one, and so on. Hence, there are different ways of understanding spaces, places and landscapes, which, thus, become ambiguous and paradoxical rather than straight-forward and homogenous (FORSBERG, G. 1996). Additionally, discourses of spaces can significantly alter in time (GYURIS, F. 2014).

The cultural turn emphasises that cultural meanings of space are significant, and not just for identity but also for „the construction of the economic meanings of peripheral areas” (PAASI, A. 1995, p. 255). For SHIELDS, R. (1991, p. 5), marginal places „carry the image and stigma of their marginality, which becomes indistinguishable from any empirical identity they might have had”. In a study on British local authority estates, HASTINGS, A. and DEAN, J. (2003) noted how the term ‘no-go’ estate became a convenient way for the media and public alike to label a wide variety of social environments, despite the fact that only a small number of these experienced unrests. Such labelling then exacerbated neighbourhood decline whereby those who could move out, leaving behind the more vulnerable: „labelled as failures, people accept and internalize this negative image. Outsiders – professionals, politicians, the media – reflect, reinforce and magnify that image. People expect to be treated badly and their image of themselves and the estate takes a further battering” (TAYLOR, M. 1998, p. 821).

Similarly, according to LANG, T. (2012, p. 1751) “(collective) self-images of actors in peripheralized regions are highly relevant and often lead to mental lock-ins setting off downward spirals of decline”. A number of examples from eastern Germany have been recognised: the town of Guben shall have “collectively resigned” (BÜRKNER, H. 2002); the German-Polish borderland be “peripherised in the heads” (MATTHIESEN, U. 2002, p. 3),

and Johanngeorgenstadt be a “self-label of a dying or already dead city” (STEINFÜHRER, A. and KABISCH, S. 2007, p. 120). As LANG, T. (2012, p. 1751) notes, as a consequence of such categories – and arguably their internalisation – “emigration appears as escape or at least as discursively constituted *modus agendi*. If such cognitive developments become dominant, complete regions tend to be paralysed and appear hostile to innovation”. In sum, spatial discourses are not only shaped by locational factors but also by images. Being classified as centre or periphery does not only affect actual developments but also potential development chances. Spatial inequality is, thus, not just a result of economic and political processes; rather, the difference between centre and periphery mirrors the societal construction of spatial order (BEETZ, S. 2008, p. 13, author’s translation).

Finally, yet another body of literature has emphasised the (potentially) positive elements of a marginal position, not just in its function of creating something new and innovative but also in bringing together various already established centres. Chinese diaspora literature in the United States (LEE, L.O. 1991), or the Kaliningrad region’s potential bridging role between the rest of Russia and the EU (BROWNING, C.S. and JOENNIEMI, P. 2004) are just two examples of a hybrid zone, meeting point, or a semiosphere (LOTMAN, Y.M. 2005) or third space (SOJA, E. 1996). It is with such a conceptual baggage that we now turn to our empirical case(s).

### **Processes of socio-economic polarisation in Békés County**

Hungary and Békés County offer illustrative examples of “social spatialisation” (SHIELDS, R. 1991). The country’s postal codes, road-network, and dialling codes all reflect the spatial hierarchy: the capital Budapest carries the number one, its surroundings the number two, with the remaining Hungarian regions being allocated subsequent numbers, clockwise on the map.

From a modernist and structuralist perspective, a powerful narrative can be presented that portrays Békés County as a peripheral area. The region is located in the south-eastern corner of Hungary – itself not an economically vibrant country – bordering Romania, one of the poorest member states of the European Union (EU). As PAASI, A. (1995, p. 255) noted, “since the territorial system is always changing, the analysis of peripheries cannot ignore the historical context”. The region’s history-in-a-nutshell could then be written as something like the following. The Great Hungarian Plain including Békés County has always tended to be a backward and peripheral region. Due to its physical features – lowlands – that make it easily accessible, the area has often been invaded by different peoples (Tartars, Turks etc.), whose empires’ borders it often constituted. Up until the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Békés County’s position was in fact in the centre of the Kingdom of Hungary, but it has been a border region ever since. Its administrative centre was moved from historical Gyula (now at the Romanian border) to Békéscsaba, which was mostly developed during the years of state socialism. For a brief period – between May 2004 and December 2006 – Békés County was even at the external border of the EU and it still is of the Schengen Area. Hence, from a conventional or absolute understanding of space the study area is in many ways a peripheral one.

In socio-economic terms the story is a very similar one. Békés County can be described as an area characterised by high rates of poverty, unemployment, out-migration, and an aging population (LŐCSEI, H. *et al.* 2013). The inhabitants of the county have the third lowest average income (KISS, A. 2014) and purchasing power (OROSZ, M. 2014) among Hungary’s twenty meso-level units. At the same time, the share of state-subsidised public labour – a strongly debated measure to combat unemployment (BAKÓ, T. *et al.* 2014) – of the region’s total labour force is among the highest. Békés’s road-network is among the poorest of all Hungarian counties, with

no motorway so far running through its territory. Due to its peripheral location, poor transport infrastructure, and possibly its monotonous landscape, the region’s touristic potential remains limited. Such a negative description unfortunately coincides with socio-economic realities to a large extent, but it is not the whole picture.

A somewhat different picture emerges if we take into account the following factors that are also characteristics of Békés County. Its many rivers make it a popular tourist destination for various water sports and recreation (SZABÓ, V. and SIMKÓ, G. 2002). While spa-towns can be found all over Hungary, Gyula and Orosháza belong to the more famous ones. Békés County’s soil is among the most fertile in the EU, even if the area’s agricultural industry has seen better days. The region’s share of Hungarikum food products – a prestigious label of premium-quality products from Hungary – is clearly over-proportional (*ibid.*, p. 46). Over the past 16–17 years, Gyula and Békéscsaba have each been hosting an annual festival dedicated to two of these “Hungarikums” (*pálinka* and sausage, respectively), with the events enjoying increased national and international recognition as well as turning attention to the region’s agricultural potentials (VJM.HU 2014).

Relatedly, some initiatives have recently been taken to revive the traditional meat industry of the region. At the same time, the railway link linking the county with Budapest is frequently operated and currently under reconstruction to allow for faster travel. Moreover, cross-border traffic from neighbouring Arad County in Romania is significant for the region’s commercial and tourism industries, evidenced by the presence of Romanian cars, signs, and people in Békéscsaba. Relatedly, Arad County’s large ethnic Hungarian population (approx. 9%) as well as Békés County’s Romanian minority (approx. 1.1%) has been offering opportunities for various types of exchange across the border.

Thus, while processes of peripheralisation are clearly present in the study area, as LANG, T. (2012, p. 1751) pointed out such processes

are revisable, as testified by a number of examples even outside the large cities and capitals of Central and Eastern Europe. Historic and spa towns – e.g. Świnoujście in Poland (LUNDÉN, T. *et al.* 2009), Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic, Visegrád and Gyula in Hungary – and formerly heavy industry-dominated places that managed to reorient towards modern industries – such as Hoyerswerda in Germany (LANG, T. 2012, p. 1751), or the Hungarian counties of Komárom-Esztergom, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Fejér – are doing comparatively well. Yet the point of this article is not to find out whether Békés County is a peripheral region or not, but to investigate how certain images associated with it can affect its development chances. Hence, it is to the discursive elements that we now turn.

### Discursive peripheralisation in Békés County and elsewhere

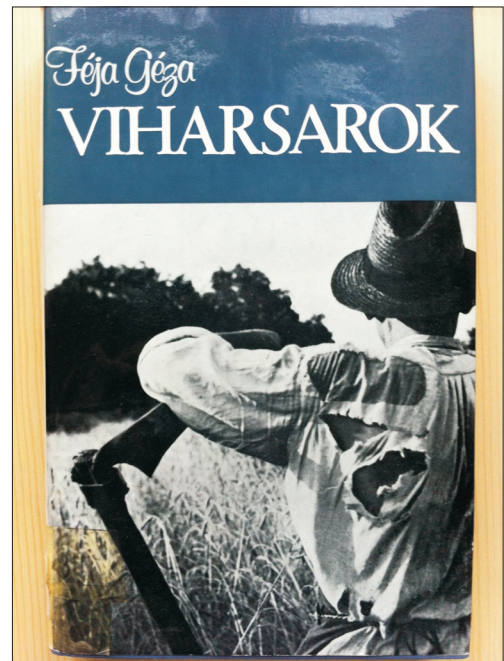
#### *Notions of peripherality in literature and film*

Images and notions of peripherality are (re)produced in popular culture, and these appear to be changing in time. In the nineteenth century, “the countryside” was rather over-idealised in Hungary (KOVÁCH, I. 2012, p. 32) as in much of Europe, by for instance national romanticist authors and poets such as Sándor Petőfi or János Arany. Spaces until then conceived as rural and peripheral stepped into the foreground by becoming subjects of over-romanticisation: in a time of growing urbanisation, longing for the rural did not just represent a search for national authenticity (*ibid*) but also a desire to return to the “untouched” nature. Under such conditions issues like poverty – also widely connected with rurality (LEIBERT, T. 2013) – were barely dealt with, if at all. The 1930s however saw the rise of the movement of “folk authors” (*népi írók*), many of whom had come from impoverished rural environments themselves. The term “folk” (*népi*) was a self-label of this loosely connected group, standing in opposition to the “urban”

and “genteel” elites (PÉTER, L. ed. 1994: 1484). Seen as a radical movement by many, the movement’s goal was not just to portray social problems – as they observed them along their journeys across the country and beyond – but also to lift these into public consciousness and to promote solutions (*ibid*).

One of these sociographic monographs, *Viharsarok* (written by FÉJA, G. 1937; *Photo 1*) – a name translated into “Land of Storms” in the title of a movie by the same name (Császai, Á. 2014) – deals with roughly the same area that today constitutes Békés County. This was not a coincidental choice, as FÉJA explains (FÉJA, G. 1937/1980, p. 11):

“When the editor presented the plan of this book series and asked me which landscape I would cover I immediately pointed to the southern Tisza Region, Transtisza’s and Hungary’s “land of storms”, where minds and hearts could never reconcile to the existing, to the Hungary that came true.



*Photo 1.* In the 1930s, the Land of Storms was typically portrayed as an inflammable, politically volatile region characterised by peasant uprisings (cf. FÉJA, G. 1937/1980)

These people were always ready to rise, to start a new life... When a spark flew there, Transtisza immediately burst into flames, burning beautifully, as if it was conscious of a better and more human life, rapidly putting up troops against the aristocracy and later against feudal-capitalist powers."

In the same year another similar sociographic work was published, *Puszták népe* (written by ILLYÉS, Gy. 1937). Although dealing with another geographic area (Tolna County), the observations made are very comparable to FÉJA's: the local population is described as heavily polarised in all sorts of ways; socially, economically, culturally etc. Defencelessness and impoverishment best describe the fate of the servantry, whose lives were strongly dependent on and regulated by their feudalistic overlords – including the right to hold guns (ILLYÉS, Gy. 1937/1969, p. 25) or even dogs (*ibid*, p. 7). And yet, "the land of Sió-Sárvíz has always shined intensely and ready-to-stick, like the sword pulled out from the scabbard, as many times as the wind of freedom was blowing... whenever blood could be shed freely, whenever the opportunity arose to pour out stifled bitterness and revenge... The people of the puszta [i.e. Hungarian grassland] are excellent soldiers... not regretting their skin. In heroism and contempt of death only the Bosnians can compete among the monarchy's peoples" (ILLYÉS, Gy. 1937/1969, p. 25).

According to the author, the combat-readiness of the puszta's servants is evidenced by their heroic actions for instance during the revolution of 1848 and World War One (*ibid*, p. 24–25). The two books have come out in a number of subsequent editions and remain included in the national curriculum for grammar-schools. However, this was not always the case. During the interwar national-conservative regime, FÉJA for instance was sued for "dishonouring the nation" and dismissed from his position as a teacher. His book remained banned during the communist period up until 1957 (Grósz, M. ed. 1995, p. 28) since it suggested allocating small lands to the peasants as a measure to combat their poverty.

Some years later another sociographic book was published that deals with the problems of a rural small town in Békés County. Its title translates into "On the country's edge" (VARGA, D. 1982), which refers to both the area's marginalised inhabitants as well as its physical location. Apart from directing attention to the severe conditions the community at stake has been living with, the author also points out the following:

"The appearance of the problems of peripheries in public opinion has an even stronger effect on social consciousness than the reality would suggest. Social consciousness is namely prone to magnify the negative phenomena of the periphery. This ... leads to exasperation and listlessness not just in the periphery, but also elsewhere. The solution is therefore not to keep silent, on the contrary..." (*ibid*, p. 11).

Hence, VARGA, D. (1982) is pointing to a potential gap between socio-material realities and perceptions of it. Importantly, he does not make the above point to belittle the problems of peripheralised areas; as the folk writers he too shows a clear commitment to finding solutions (*ibid*, p. 11–12). But the quote above emphasises the crucial point that images and discourses of peripherality can be very powerful and influential on the whole of society. Nevertheless, the author himself makes some doubtful and essentialising claims, such as that "on the periphery everything unfolds in a different way than in the centres; everything substantial and important takes shape differently than it should" (VARGA, D. 1982, p. 9), or that the village he observed suffers from higher internal income inequalities than other Hungarian settlements (*ibid*).

The author further suggests that "unknown and therefore uncontrollable processes and initiatives can bud on the peripheries", giving "antisocial intentions of certain strata among the urban young" as well as "the growing sect-movements" that he relates primarily to rural areas, as examples (VARGA, D. 1982, p. 11). In reality, the spread of various free churches – a fairer description than sects – that was indeed characteristic for Hungary in the 1980s (and 1990s) was more typical of ur-



ban environments. Yet VARGA (*ibid*) recognises that “value can be created at the periphery, too; such artistic treasure that competes with the already familiar and recognised merits” (*cf.* LEE, L.O. 1991). Indeed, at times elements of folk culture – typically originating in rural places – such as handcraft, folk music and dance – have been important identity-markers of many societies, and even been more widely associated with the authentic national to gain political (KOVÁCH, I. 2012, p. 32) but also commercial value.

An even more provoking and arguably also arrogant idea is raised in another volume by two young sociographers (MÁTYUS, A. and TAUSZ, K. 1984), namely that the servants – while “liberated” in 1945 – have got accustomed to dependence and for many of them self-dependence is often more dangerous than defencelessness. Nevertheless, the book series *Gyorsuló idő* that VARGA’s and the latter work were included in set out to deal with contemporary social problems.

The years around the regime change in 1989 were a time for (a probably too incautious) optimism regarding the whole of Hungary’s development, which might explain why issues of peripheralised areas stepped into the background. One remarkable and highly-prized exception is the novel *Sátántangó* (KRASZNAHORKAI, L. 1985), adapted into a seven-hour long film in 1994 and published in English in 2012. The story – spread over a couple of days of endless rain – focuses on the dozen remaining inhabitants of an unnamed isolated hamlet, although the movie version is known to have been shot in Békés County (STÖCKERT, G. and VALUSKA, L. 2011).

It portrays “failures stuck in the middle of nowhere... Their world is rough and ready, lost somewhere between the comic and tragic, in one small insignificant corner of the cosmos. Theirs is the dance of death”, as can be read on the website of the publisher of the English translation (New Directions 2015). The reviews published there describe the story as “an hours-long slog through mud and meaninglessness and superstition”, KRASZNAHORKAI as “a poet of dilapidation”,

his work as “a bruising study of expectation and failure”. In sum, a highly-prized work based on strongly negative images of Békés County, although implicitly.

The most influential contemporary writer from and on the southern Great Plain is most likely Krisztián GRECSÓ. His first book, recently published for the third time (GRECSÓ, K. 2013), is portrayed by a major distributor as “bringing fresh news from depths we rarely receive genuine reports from” (Libri 2015). The author himself is described as a native turned into an ethnographer, and “the question is left to the reader whether this makes him a traitor” (*ibid*). In GRECSÓ’s latest book (2014), the *Land of Storms* carries with itself the notions of soil-boundedness, immutability, and forgottenness: “in the *Land of Storms* no miracles are taking place. There, waiting for miracles is a miracle in itself; the mirage that one day for someone it will be better – that there is such a thing as better at all” (GRECSÓ, K. 2014, p. 179). Accordingly, the book’s main character begins asking himself whether his misfortunes are a result of his own decisions, or rather of his “land-of-storminess” and thus, “peripheral” existence. The latter interpretation is supported by the book’s title “I’m following you”, reflecting a desire to leave, dependence and subordination – i.e. features widely associated with peripherality (*cf.* LANG, T. 2012). Despite all the negative images surrounding it, and despite having moved to Budapest himself, the *Land of Storms* is also a place loved by GRECSÓ together with all its peripheral features.

Finally, an already-mentioned movie was presented at last year’s Berlin Film Festival by the title “*Land of Storms*” (Császai, Á. 2014), thus, largely set in Békés County. The film was described as “a potently atmospheric drama of three young gay men wrestling with their sexuality in an unaccommodating environment” (ROONEY, D. 2014). One of the local characters “loosens up as barriers are broken down, but the pressure of his religious beliefs, his needy mother, a sometime girlfriend and the homophobic local youths fuels his conflict” (*ibid*). Whereas



Békés County may not be known for its particular openness towards certain groups such as gays, characterising the region by piety and homophobia is rather misleading as neither religiosity (DÖVÉNYI, Z. and NÉMETH, Á. 2014) nor support for the far right – however unsatisfying measures of homophobia – are typical features of the area.

*Popular scientific notions of peripherality and centrality*

Images and notions of peripherality and centrality are also (re)produced in popular scientific literature, including by geographers themselves. A good number of examples of this can be found in *A Földgömb*, the popular scientific journal of the Hungarian Geographical Society. While Hungarian borderlands and other areas conceived as peripheral are frequently covered, there is a number of interesting patterns regarding the ways these are described.

The vast majority of the articles are written from the centre's perspective, often using dichotomies like us/them or here/there, targeting audiences in "centres" like Budapest and other larger cities. A report on the Dráva Plain (PÁLFAI, L. 2002) – a micro-region along Hungary's southern borders – that bears the subheading "Faces of a forgotten landscape" starts off with the following: "the attributive in the subheading may perhaps appear as exaggerated, but if we start asking around in our acquaintanceship we will be astonished to learn how little people know about this land..." (*ibid*, p. 32).

In contrast, an account of the Bereg Region (PRISTYÁK, E. 2005) in north-eastern Hungary constantly talks of our values of the region. A quick search reveals that the author works at the local university college; thus, her local embeddedness might partly explain why she gives an impression of making attempts at advertising the region to tourists, by for instance starting the article by that "the Bereg is not only nice in July and August" and by using subheadings like "The magic of the Upper Tisza region" (*ibid*, p. 39). In some cases, the

centre's perspective is particularly explicit. An article on the Csángós (KOKAS, A. 2013a) consistently contrasts their life to "yours" – i.e. that of the imagined or targeted reader of *A Földgömb*. "You are always correlating! Your urban life to their rural existence... They live in the countryside in Romania. A bit off the map – in every respect." (*ibid*, p. 35) Finally, a foreword in a theme issue on Central Asia starts off by saying that it has never been easy for outsiders to get by in the region's hidden parts (NAGY, B. 2013, p. 1).

Certain places are also peripheralised by being depicted as forgotten or remote. Similarly to PÁLFAI's already-mentioned essay (2002), a contribution on the Tiszazug (MEZŐ, S. 2004) is subtitled as "A forgotten landscape in the heart of the Hungarian Great Plain". The next report in the same issue is on Lavenham, "where time stopped" (PETHŐ, A. 2004, p. 44) despite the fact that today this English town is a popular day-trip destination for people from across the country. Of course, the image that "time stopped" in a certain place can also make it appear attractive, at least temporarily. Yet, probably few of us are drawn to places that are forgotten, at least in the longer run.

Rural and sparsely populated areas are often exoticised and/or romanticised. A portrayal of Hortobágy (TAMÁSKA, M. 2004a) – a landscape of the Hungarian Great Plain often deemed as iconic in (national) historiography – describes it as "a romantic water world, with its timber-wolves, million fishes, shepherd, fishermen, hunters, wranglers, and crabbers, exiled into the works of ethnographers". Another essay commemorates the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Sándor Rózsa, Hungary's most (in)famous scamp whose terrain was the Southern Great Plain (KOKAS, A. 2013b). The flourishing of rascally lifestyle in the region in the nineteenth century is explained by its then largely wild and impoverished character, where authorities had difficulties to maintain control and order (*ibid*, p. 27–29). At the same time, some regions – often already popular tourist destinations – are ascribed positively sounding slogans, thereby further contributing to their popularity.

A contribution to a special issue on the Adriatic coastline is entitled “Portray of a «happy land»” (NEMERKÉNYI, A. 2004) – an earlier label by Le Corbusier (DE CASTRO GONÇALVES, J.F. 2013, p. 199). The already mentioned town of Gyula is sometimes referred to as the “pearl of the East”. Unlike with many ascriptions of peripheries, in these cases the labels used are put within quotation marks. Nevertheless, one recent report (VJM.HU 2014) presents Békéscsaba in a positive light, claiming that the annual sausage-festival is now so popular that it makes the city the country’s capital for four days, thanks to the locals’ hospitality and so on (Photo 2). Interestingly, the label Land of Storms receives a different connotation here, understood as “the country’s but-tery” (*ibid*).

The contrast between the ways centrality and peripherality are portrayed is particularly apparent in two successive issues of *Világjáró*, a quality travel magazine. The

article on the Southern Great Plain bears the title “Treasures of meandering river valleys” (SZABÓ, V. and SIMKÓ, G. 2002). The second sentence says: “...this land was not only shaped by man’s presence but also by his disappearance; as a result of depopulation under the Turks nature has reoccupied her realm” (*ibid*, p. 42). In contrast, the contribution on Budapest and the Central Danube Region is entitled “Where the country’s heart beats” (SZABÓ, V. 2003). According to the introductory paragraph:

“If we look at Hungary’s map, Budapest appears as a huge heart pumping blood through vessels – along the motorways and railroads – to the entire body of the country... It appears as if the heart of our weather-beaten country – and possibly of the entire world – has always beaten here” (*ibid*, p. 40).

The metaphor of a biological body representing a country – in this case Hungary – is interesting, though neither new nor unique. Already RATZEL, F. (1903) made the comparison between a state and a biological organism, with his idea later misinterpreted and abused by territorial revisionist decision-makers and scholars. The metaphor is of course not irredentist in itself; it does, however, represent and maintain an image of a country or nation as a clearly distinguishable unit with its own life and development. A biological body not least has a heart, brain, and limbs – comparably to a demarcated territory’s centres and peripheries (*cf.* BEETZ, S. 2008, p. 13). Another article from *A Földgömb* on Prague (TAMÁSKA, M. 2004b) is long describing the beauties of the city centre. According to the short final paragraph, then:

“Further away from Old town square ... a completely different world begins. The grey block-houses and factory-quarters surround as a modern city-wall all that we call Prague. It would be difficult to write about their features, probably only the after-ages will discover any beauty in them” (*ibid*, p. 17).

Finally, images of centrality can be maintained long after a place’s central functions have diminished. As a report on Sztána, the “central place” (*központos hely*) of Kalotaszeg



Photo 2. In the 2000s, the Land of Storms has typically been associated with an aging population and a lack of dynamism, but also with considerable potentials for food production and culinary tourism

– a region of Transylvania – informs us, back in the days of steam locomotives all trains had to make a stop at this small and tranquil but picturesque village (TAMÁSKA, M. 2005, p. 43). When Károly Kós – a famous architect of the time – first spotted the area, he described his feelings as: “I’m just standing at the edge of the mountain, and I know, I feel every bit now that I’m standing right in the middle of Kalotaszeg, which has been giving me all the beauties of its wonders as a present...” (*ibid*). The area became a popular resort for Transylvanian intellectuals up until 1944 and even after fast-trains no longer stopped there it preserved the designation of a “central place”, reproduced in TAMÁSKA’s article and elsewhere. In Békés County, the geometrical centre of historical Hungary is since 1939 commemorated with a windmill at Szarvas (SZABÓ, V. and SIMKÓ, G. 2002, p. 45).

## Conclusions

The paper has testified to the value of popular cultural and popular scientific sources in our search for the roots of long-surviving spatial images and discourses. The dominant image of Békés County is that of a peripheral area; it is striking that the term periphery (*periféria*) often features even in novels and sociographic works targeting a broad audience. The question then is what this peripherality and the epithet Land of Storms has meant for those who used them, and what kind of qualities have been ascribed to them. The analysis showed that the attributes assigned have altered significantly over time: while “land-of-storminess” mostly referred to toughness, severity, and a revolutionary spirit up until the 1950s, it has since the 1980s on the contrary been associated with passivity, tardiness, and tepidity. Indeed, FORSBERG, G. (1996) pointed out that even the same place or landscape can be read in different ways, and GYURIS, F. (2014) that spatial discourses can change in time. But what is interesting about these shifting images of the Land of Storms is that they have

all the time been attributed to the region’s peripherality. This is intriguing since features like a revolutionary spirit are not necessarily typical of peripherality. As an example, societal change including uprisings has at least in Hungary often been initiated in centres.

Most of the sources and the notions of peripherality produced are written from the centre’s perspective. This is particularly true for popular scientific works that are largely written and read by audiences in the centres, who offer and are offered commercial and/or romanticised images of peripheral areas. In particular, portraying places as remote and/or forgotten (PÁLFAI, L. 2002; MEZŐ, S. 2004) most obviously reflects the writer’s perspective, and possibly that of the target audience. It is illustrative that one of the few contributions written by a resident of a non-metropolitan region (PRISTYÁK, E. 2005) shows no signs of perceiving her area as remote – let alone forgotten. This confirms the observation by DE OLIVEIRA, S.M. (2002, p. 254) that while outsiders may perceive the local inhabitants as being at the periphery, they themselves do not.

Hence, categories like a distant location or poor connectedness reflect the viewer’s angle: thus, Budapest is more distant and inaccessible for marginalised groups in Békés County than is the latter for car-owners in the capital – let alone the mental distances. Such attributes might of course be exaggerated by writers in order to make their cases more interesting, but that also contributes to the (re)production of images of peripheral areas as being essentially different from centres. As we saw even among older, well-established literary sources, authors such as ILLYÉS, Gy. (1937/1969) or at some point MÁRUY, A. and TAUSZ, K. (1984) could make rather pejorative statements about peripheral areas. All the above supports the observation of PAASI, A. (1995, p. 255) that “representations of the peripheries are typically constructed and defined in cores”, thereby maintaining the established socio-spatial order.

What can all this imply for the development of a region like Békés County? As BEETZ, S. (2008, p. 13) noted images are highly

important for any place's development and investment potentials. Historical and recent associations with the label Land of Storms are not the most ideal for building a positive image of the region, nor for regional identity. In terms of socio-economic realities then, growing inequalities within and emigration from Békés County are only little compensated by a much smaller immigration and by modest cross-border flows (NAGY, G. *et al.* 2012). There is a real risk that the region remains a socio-economic black hole on Hungary's – and Europe's – map. Yet as other examples have shown, processes of peripheralisation are revisable (LANG, T. 2012, p. 1751; LUNDÉN, T. *et al.* 2009). Békés County's cross-border potential for instance near Gyula or Arad is not as exploited as in the borderlands around Satu Mare or Oradea in Romania (*cf.* ȚOCA, C.-V. 2012) or Subotica in Serbia. The improving railway connections may bring further benefits. As images of the Land of Storms have been changing in the past, more positive associations with it (*cf.* VJM.HU 2014) may emerge in the future that should benefit the region – and thereby Hungary as a whole (*cf.* VARGA, D. 1982, p. 11).

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# AQUINCUM

## Ancient Landscape – Ancient Town

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Geomorphological–paleoenvironmental studies supporting archeological excavations and investigations are to be considered a new trend within the broader sphere of studies on environment and geomorphology. By publishing the latest achievements of researches of this kind carried out on the territory of Aquincum and in its wider surroundings this book may equally reckon on the interest of professional circles and inquiring audience.

Therefore the publication of such a volume of somewhat unusual character is welcome. The project could be completed as a result of the close cooperation of two important branches of studies, notably geography and archeology. They both have long lasting traditions in our country and on this occasion were represented by two prominent institutions, the Geographical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the Aquincum Museum of the Budapest History Museum. Their contribution has made possible the publication of this book.

The studies were aimed to clear up the role of those natural factors which exerted a profound influence on the development of the settlement structure during the Roman Period. Romans had a special ability to realize advantages provided by geomorphological characteristics and they had made a good use of natural waters, flood-plain surface features and parent rocks for their creativity.

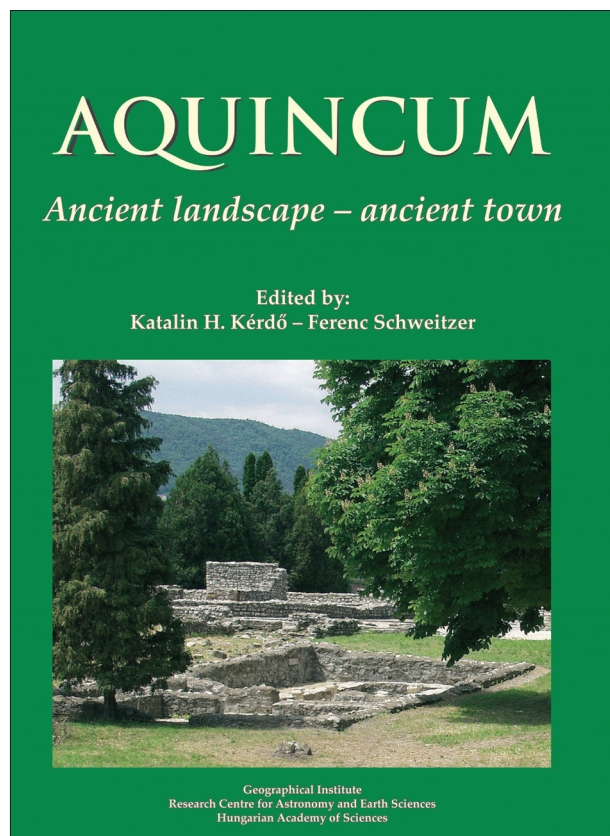
The volume is also deemed as a pioneering work with regard to the richly illustrated presentation of geological, geographical and other natural features exposed in several places in the course of archeological excavations. A short summary shows the most important objects of the Roman Period related to natural endowments and traces of activities of the time leading to environmental transformation.

Based on geomorphological evidence a new answer is proposed to a previously raised problem whether the Hajógyári Island existed as an islet already in the time of the Romans. Another intriguing issue tackled is the purpose of the system of trenches found in several places along the Danube River.

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## Recreational home owners in the leadership and governance of peripheral recreational communities

GRETE KINDEL<sup>1</sup> and GARRI RAAGMAA<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This paper addresses recreational home owners' role in local leadership and governance, focusing on whether they counteract or reinforce the peripheralisation of remotely located communities. If recreational house owners (RHO) grow in number, they become stronger stakeholders with an increased ability to impact the social and economic life of communities. Possessing high interpretive and network power, they should have fairly good opportunities to contribute to local development. The greatest challenge is to find a balance and create positive synergies between permanent and temporary residents' interests. Here, leadership quality has a great importance in orchestrating relations and communication between interest groups. Empirically, the paper is based on a comparative case study of Noarootsi and Vormsi, two tiny municipalities located on the Estonian West coast, which is outside the daily commuting area of urban centres. Both case study areas have similar cultural and historical development paths and economic bases. Since they practiced very different leadership models during the last 25 years, we can compare whether and how this impacted governance and overall development. We used media analysis, statistical data and the results of students' fieldwork as a background; moreover, we conducted 20 in-depth interviews with key informants. The results show the highly important role of RHOs in local governance depending on their personal background and motives. At the same time, the results also indicate the need for skilful local leadership to encourage the participation and equal involvement of all permanent and temporary resident interest groups in decision making.

**Keywords:** leadership, governance, recreational home owner, recreational periphery, Estonia

### Introduction

This paper analyses the role of the group of recreational home owners (RHO) in the leadership and governance of peripheral communities. Recreational, also labelled second, leisure, vacation, weekend, holiday, beach, country or seasonal homes include luxurious mansion-type buildings, small houses, shanties, cabins, cottages, ski chalets, trailer homes, and static caravans (MARCOUILLER, W.D. and CHRACA, A. 2011). MÜLLER uses the term "second home", which is not entirely correct since some families own three or even more such properties (MÜLLER, K.D. 2002).

We define recreational peripheries as territories outside the daily commuting areas of urban centres where a significant part of the population lives temporarily, mainly during the summer and weekends, and mostly uses land for recreational purposes such as various sports, minor hobby cultivation, mushroom and berry picking. RHOs often remain invisible in statistics: they are included neither in the population registers nor in tourism accounts. Nevertheless, whereas a RHO is 'likely to be less concerned with the fate of the community where resides and more with activities that may be scattered throughout the [urban] field but are closest to interests, leading to a stronger identification on his part with the realm' (FRIEDMANN, J. and MILLER, J.

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1965, p. 317), then an active and motivated member of a local community may well contribute to its development. Otherwise, RHOs may also create problems for permanent residents (FARSTAD, M. 2011) and reinforce peripheralisation processes when blocking development initiatives in the local council because of their desire for peace and quiet.

The RHO phenomenon and their impact has been well described by several authors (GALLENT, N. *et al.* 2003; GALLENT, N. 2007; PARIS, C. 2009; FARSTAD, M. 2011; RYE, F. and BERG, G.N. 2011; MARCOUILLER, W.D. and CHRACA, A. 2011; NORDIN, U. and MARJAVAARA, R. 2012; NORDBO, I. 2014) but so far, the literature on the participation of RHOs in local leadership and governance is fairly limited, thus, it deserves a more thorough investigation.

The restructuring of local power can counteract or reinforce peripherality. On the one hand, new people usually see new horizons, initiate new developments, apply new ways of governance, and, especially when speaking about RHOs, extend networking (bridging social capital). On the other hand, a power shift usually causes conflicts and a negative image of a place, leading to further peripheralisation due to the marginalisation of some groups who may not be involved in the governance any more.

Following this reasoning, we chose the following questions to clarify RHOs' role in local leadership:

- How do RHOs' motives and behaviour impact socialisation with local community?
- How do different representation/leadership models impact local relations and the involvement of RHOs in local decision making?
- What are the main lessons for leadership when involving RHOs in local governance?

We carried out a comparative case study in two municipalities on the Estonian West coast. The paper consists of the following sections: (i) the theoretical overview of the recreational home phenomenon and leadership connection based on a literature review, (ii) a presentation of the case study areas and the RHOs' activities in different leadership regimes, and (iii) finally, our conclusion.

## Literature review

The choice of location with recreational homes is influenced by natural conditions (MARCOUILLER, W.D. and CHRACA, A. 2011; LIPKINA, O. 2013). City people are willing to consume qualitatively different amenities that they cannot access or afford in urban areas and, thus, they are looking for more distant places to charge their batteries. Recreational homes are located mainly in areas of valuable natural environment: coastland, islands or mountains and places of social and cultural meaning (GALLENT, N. *et al.* 2003; DIJST, M. *et al.* 2005; PITKÄNEN, K. 2008; NORRIS, M. and WINSTON, N. 2010).

It is typical for places of tourism to be in the periphery. In this way, remote regions economically benefit from factors which cannot be utilised otherwise: high mountain chains, barren, rocky landscapes, heather, unproductive dunes' (CHRISTALLER, W. 1963, p. 96). FRIEDMANN and MILLER described the spreading urban field and 'the increasing attractiveness of the periphery to metropolitan populations. (FRIEDMANN, J. and MILLER, J. 1965, p. 315). It has space, it has scenery, and it contains communities that remain from earlier periods of settlement and preserve a measure of historical integrity and interest'. Thus, recreational land use in geographical peripheries has been described over 50 years ago already.

The mobility of people has increased due to rising welfare and ever widening car ownership (PETTERSSON, R. 1999; DIJST, M. *et al.* 2005; MOSS, L.A.G. 2006). Less densely populated wealthy countries and regions in Northern America and Europe have witnessed increasing recreational commuting (MÜLLER, K.D. 2002; DIJST, M. *et al.* 2005; PITKÄNEN, K. 2008; PARIS, C. 2009; NORRIS, M. and WINSTON, N. 2010; MARCOUILLER, W.D. and CHRACA, A. 2011; LIPKINA, O. 2013). A growing number of people live and consume in two or more places. The most of geographically remote areas suffered from a steady demographic downward trajectory over decades nevertheless, several touristic and seasonal living areas have been subject to positive, so called post-productivist development (HALFACREE, K. 2006), as tourists

and recreational house dwellers contributed to the increase of population (at least seasonally), as well as to retail and service consumption significantly. Increasing flows might justify investments into local infrastructure from the national budget and also by private developers.

On the other hand, permanent residents and RHOs may compete for local resources (FARSTAD, M. 2011); extensive recreational house ownership may increase the tax burden of local residents and even cause the displacement of the 'native' population (HALL, C.M. 2010). Local people's attitude towards RHOs depends foremost on their interest and readiness to contribute to the communities' social and cultural life (FARSTAD, M. 2011). Recreational house owners' socialization with the local community depends on their personal willingness to communicate, the existing institutional set up, the settlement structure, and also on the attitude and activities of local governments. RHOs may enrich local close-knit communities with bridging and linking social capital and create additional opportunities (e.g., drag in public or also private investments from outside, increase the knowledge level of local entrepreneurs) and improve the quality of life in a locality (ROBERTSSON, L. and MARJAVAARA, R. 2014).

On the basis of literature, we can outline the following factors explaining recreational house purchases:

(1) According to *compensation theory* people obtain and visit second homes because their permanent home doesn't offer fully acceptable living conditions (NORRIS, M. and WINSTON, N. 2010).

(2) *Life-cycle theory* distinguishes the first stage when people with children are looking for a quiet and child-friendly environment (GALLENT, N. *et al.* 2003) and the second stage before or after retirement when people are willing to move out of the city to find a calm and beautiful environment for living (NORRIS, M. and WINSTON, N. 2010). Both groups are looking for lower-priced and less centrally located housing.

(3) *Investment theories* explain the purchase of a second house as an investment by those

whose credit ratings are good and those who have possibilities to invest their savings (NORRIS, M. and WINSTON, N. 2010).

(4) The *availability of free land* is also an important factor (RYE, F. and BERG, G.N. 2011), explaining why recreational housing is much more represented on the sparsely populated edges of Europe (Nordic countries, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean) and peripheral regions further away from cities.

(5) Increasing mobility and ever widening car ownership allows people to commute between second and permanent homes (RYE, F. and BERG, G.N. 2011).

(6) Last but not least, *rural idyll* also attracts RHOs (MÜLLER, K.D. 2002; PITKÄNEN, K. 2008; RYE, F. and BERG, G.N. 2011).

The above reasons normally combine. Usually, RHOs are well educated and wealthier people (DIJST, M. *et al.* 2005), own a car for commuting (STEWART, S.I. 2002; MOSS, L.A.G. 2006) and are seeking a place where they can spend their leisure time and raise children (LUNDHOLM, E. 2006). PERLIK found that RHOs usually prefer places with social networks and people who share their views, life-style and culture (PERLIK, M. 2010). If RHOs grow in number, they become stronger stakeholders with an increased ability to impact the social and economic life of communities (KALTENBORN, B.P. *et al.* 2009). RHOs are normally better educated (DIJST, M. *et al.* 2005; NORDBO, I. 2014) and have higher interpretive power than the locals. They may lack network and resource power (SOTARAUTA, M. 2009) locally, but have better networks on the national and international level. Combining the strengths and resources of permanent and temporary residents has great potential for positive synergies.

At the other extreme, in the case of conflicts and opportunistic behaviour, a great deal of energy might be wasted on internal fights. Local politicians may even focus on RHOs or their business related interests and leave permanent residents and their problems on the back seat (GALLENT, N. 2007). The greatest challenge for the communities of recreational areas is to find a balance and synergy between permanent and recreational residents.



NORDIN and MARJAVAARA found that RHOs' involvement in local communities is an important factor in avoiding possible conflicts (NORDIN, U. and MARJAVAARA, R. 2012). GALLENT uses the term "dwelling hierarchy" which means that different parties are communicating with each other and it is the foundation for a strong and uniform community (GALLENT, N. 2007). RYE and BERG point out that the second home phenomenon influences the social structures of communities horizontally and enhances their social and cultural heterogeneity through embracing new people and traditions in the area (RYE, F. and BERG, G.N. 2011). Time and common experiences create a basis for social communion causing positive development (FALK and KILPATRICK 2000; op. cit. GALLENT, N. 2007). Social capital creating process can help to build a community, where common bases are evoked by trust and a growing well-being (GALLENT, N. 2007), as well as a collaborative governance approach (PURDY, J.M. 2012).

FARSTAD found that RHO involvement in local community depends on how much they are interested in local life and how much they are ready to contribute to it (FARSTAD, M. 2011). RHOs often consider from their own interests, demanding privileges, rights, authority and local resources without giving anything in return. They do not consider local needs and they are interested in topics that are connected to their property or environment directly or implicitly. Usually, they protest against any developments which can damage their living environment. On the positive side, RHOs may contribute to the improvement of employment, consuming local products and services (e.g., pushing snow, selling firewood and vegetables, doing repair works) that stimulates the local economy (MÜLLER, K.D. 2002; RYE, F. and BERG, G.N. 2011). In addition, RHOs ought to pay taxes to the local municipality. Consequently, if the RHOs manage to improve local economic and social qualities, they are accepted more by the community. Thus, leadership quality has a great importance in orchestrating relations and communication between different interest groups.

However, their contribution could be even stronger. GIANNIAS, D. *et al.* (2010) point out that local power in peripheries is often locked in and avoids innovations. According to BARCA, F. (2009), 'rent-seeking' local elites restrain critical social innovations and hinder potential economic development (investments, new business entries). Can we consider RHOs, when they are sufficiently embedded in the local communities, as people who can break path dependency or, as DAFT, L.R. (1998) writes, as people 'participating in change' and predisposed to innovation (SOTARAUTA, M. 2009)? Can RHOs become local leaders or at least join and encourage leadership processes? Under what conditions and in what way might that happen? What consequences may this intervention have?

HORLINGS, I. (2010), SOTARAUTA, M. (2012) and RAAGMAA, G. *et al.* (2012) examined the role of public sector leaders and found that they have an essential role in igniting new local/regional development and social capital creating process. However, MINTZBERG, H. (1998) stressed that the followers and teams around leaders are no less important. How can RHOs as potential agents of change motivate local people? Do they understand each other and do they share similar values? Quite often, RHOs have an active social life in their recreational destination (due to family ties, friendship) and rather limited communication with their neighbours in their city apartments or suburban neighbourhoods. RHOs possessing high interpretative and network power (SOTARAUTA, M. 2009) have fairly good opportunities to contribute to local leadership and to enter local governance structures.

## Methodology and data

RHOs remain 'invisible' in population statistics or are incorrectly registered because of the rigidity of the registration systems that do not account for people's increased mobility (MARCOUILLER, W.D. and CHRACA, A. 2011). RHOs are normally embedded into local community affairs one way or another.

It is common that after many years of statistical invisibility, a recreational homeowner being part of the community and local decision making for years registers and becomes a permanent resident. Therefore, we chose the case study method, focussing on interviews attempting to pinpoint and describe causal processes and identify the real involvement of part-time residents in local governance.

The methodological frame of this study is based on SAYER'S critical realism (SAYER, A. 1992). He states that the traditional (positivistic) social science approach usually describes the top of the iceberg without seeking deeper

casual relations. Therefore, we compared the social phenomena of two municipalities, using KEDDIE'S comparative case study methodology (KEDDIE, V. 2006). CAMPBELL, S. *et al.* (2010) explained how this method helps to study the context and the characteristics of concrete phenomena: the comparative case study aims to find contrasts, similarities and patterns of different cases, thus, it rests on the combination of different sources and data.

We chose two rural municipalities – Noarootsi and Vormsi in West Estonia – with a high share of recreational population (Figure 1). Both of them are well-discussed



Fig 1. Location of Noarootsi and Vormsi municipalities inside Lääne county in West Estonia. In case of their 9 villages extra investigations were carried out

in the national media because of local power struggles. These two municipalities are recreational peripheries: located outside the daily commuting area of the regional capital Haapsalu. They have attracted numerous second house owners from the capital city Tallinn and abroad (mainly Sweden). Basic data for both municipalities can be seen in *Table 1*.

The content analysis materials were collected from the Lääne County newspaper *Lääne Elu* and two national newspapers *Maaleht* (rural weekly) and *Eesti Päevaleht* (daily). The main keywords were ‘Vormsi’, ‘Noarootsi’, ‘Estonian Swedes’ and ‘elections’.

After choosing the fields and analysing their conditions, the study plan was updated and then, twenty in-depth semi-structured

*Table 1. Basic data for the investigated rural municipalities*

Municipality	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Population, person			Driving distance from			
					Tallinn		Haapsalu	
		1934	1989	2015	km	minutes	km	minutes
Noarootsi	296	4,388	909	840	110	90	37	30
Vormsi	93	2,547	347	412	123	240*	25	150*

\*Including ferry

Noarootsi and Vormsi have a similar cultural background (the areas were populated mainly by Swedes before World War II) and RHOs actively participate in local governance. At the same time, they have had different leadership practices in the past: Noarootsi was ruled by one strong charismatic leader for 22 years (1987–2009), whereas Vormsi has had a constantly changing weak local leadership.

For the background study, we made a media analysis and analysed statistical data provided by the Statistics Estonia and the National Electoral Committee. Moreover, we employed students to collect recreational housing fieldwork data in the selected Noarootsi and Vormsi villages in 2014 and 2015 (*Table 2*).

interviews were conducted with former and actually appointed mayors, civil servants, NGO leaders, village elders, municipality council members and RHOs involved in local affairs between November 14, 2012 and May 23, 2014. Each conversation was recorded and transcribed.

The interview guide covered the following topics:

- (1) identity and community feeling,
- (2) interpersonal relations and social capital,
- (3) leadership, and
- (4) governance.

The identity questions aimed to figure out different local sub-groups. The questions addressing social relations and capital revealed permanent residents’ and RHOs’ relations and their involvement in community life.

Leadership and governance-related questions helped to understand the motivations behind power changes.

*Table 2. Recreational households in the villages of the two municipalities*

Municipality	Villages	Total number of households	Recreational households	
			number	%
Noarootsi	Elbiku	48	32	66.7
	Einbi	47	31	66.0
	Höbringi	14	9	64.3
	Riguldi	47	38	80.9
	Rooslepa	26	21	80.7
	Spithami	34	31	91.2
Vormsi	Kersleti	15	8	53.3
	Borby	16	15	93.8
	Rälby	24	18	75.0

### **The formation of recreational population in Noarootsi and Vormsi**

Noarootsi rural municipality covers an area of 296 km<sup>2</sup> in Lääne County, western Estonia. According to the population register, 840 inhabitants lived in Noarootsi municipality on

July 1, 2015. The real situation is different, as a number of registered inhabitants are RHOs and students living elsewhere. The average population density in Noarootsi is very low (3 persons per km<sup>2</sup>). Nevertheless, local population is tripled in the summer season. Noarootsi has about 100 km of sandy coastline, and it is highly attractive as a recreational area. Its main economic activities are tourism, wood processing, forestry and agriculture (*Photo 1*).

Vormsi, Estonia's fourth largest island (93 km<sup>2</sup>) is located in also in Lääne County, on the Western part of Estonia and has 14 villages. On July 1, 2015, Vormsi had 417 registered inhabitants (4.3 persons per km<sup>2</sup>). Nevertheless, in statistical estimations, three-quarters of them do not live there permanently. An additional motivation for registering on the island comes from the 50 percent discount on ferry tickets for local people. Vormsi population has also been

fluctuating recently due to the so-called election migration, such as to the registration of trusted voters on the island. In 2011, many people signed out because of the new land taxation system and of the availability of free public transport in Tallinn. Vormsi Isle is desirable for RHOs from Tallinn because of its closeness to the capital and its insularity. The dominant economic activities in Vormsi are tourism, forestry and agriculture (*Photo 2*).

Our case study area used to be the area inhabited by Estonian Swedes or Costal Swedes (in Swedish *Estlandssvenskar* and colloquially, *Aibofolke*) in the largest number before World War II. The beginning of continuous settlement in these areas (known as Aiboland) dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to the 1934 census, 7,641 Estonian Swedes lived in Estonia. About 7,000 of them fled to Sweden in 1944 (EE 2014) and only a few of them chose to stay. Newcomers from the mainland settled in the area and additional



*Photo 1.* Permanent Estonian-Swedish inhabitant with Aiboland's flag in Noarootsi





*Photo 2. Norby village street view in Vormsi (Photos by G. KINDEL)*

permanent residents were attracted to the area by the organisation of collective farms.

During the Soviet time, migration in the border zones was strictly controlled. Regardless of the border regime, next to the permanent residents, an access to the area was also granted to the Communist Party elites who were able to get building permits for new summerhouses or to purchase local farmhouses and renovate them as summer cottages. Owning a second house on the coast and particularly, on the islands has gained popularity among the political elites and intellectuals since the 1970s. By 1980 Vormsi and Noarootsi were already functioning as recreational housing areas. Additionally, several industrial enterprises and central government organisations set up their holiday house complexes and camps there. Therefore, the first generation of RHOs had a specific elitist background. Several former RHOs still live in the area as permanent residents; they are well embedded in the local networks and generally respected by other people.

Estonia initiated a restitution-based land reform in 1992 that returned property to pre-war owners and their heirs. The majority of Estonian Swedes used this opportunity but some of them either disclaimed or sold their land to new people, mainly to the new RHOs from Tallinn. The majority of Swedish people did not return as permanent residents, but started to use their property for recreational purposes. The formation of new recreational house communities was different in Noarootsi and Vormsi.

The Swedish returnees and other new land owners were always welcome by the Noarootsi Mayor, Ülo Kalm. His aim was to increase the number of permanent residents (thus, personal income tax revenues) and for this he tried to convince RHOs to register in the Noarootsi municipality. Meanwhile, the Vormsi municipality decided not to return land to Estonian Swedes and proposed to create small zones where Estonian Swedes could build their recreational homes. This idea was not supported by the Estonian Parliament and accelerated the



conflict between Estonian Swedes and Vormsi municipality. As a result of the disputes, the majority of Estonian Swedes got back their land but not the houses which were inhabited by new *bona fide* owners.

According to the 2011 census, 77 Estonians owned a second house in Vormsi and 236 in Noarootsi municipality (Statistics Estonia 2014). Today, Noarootsi and Vormsi RHOs are mainly middle-aged, well-educated, well-off people that confirms earlier research results on the structure of RHO population (e.g. DIJST, M. *et al.* 2005; LUNDHOLM, E. 2006). Second home owners from the 1990s onwards are mainly from Tallinn, and they are wealthier than locals and the 1970s RHOs. Newcomers have more contacts with each other and with their neighbours.

The interviewees complained about that the newcomers have a strong NIMBY mentality; they often fight against new developments or for their own business projects. Relationships between Estonian RHOs and permanent residents depend on specific persons. The interviewees found that the RHOs' open-mindedness and their understanding of local habits help to pursue an easy life together. Warmer relationships are settled with the RHOs who have been there for a long time and who take part in the locals' projects and events. Some RHOs are members of local NGOs and help to arrange local actions. Nevertheless, a number of recreational home owners do not want to take part in any local actions and prefer to stay isolated in peace and quiet.

RHOs from Sweden were not included in Estonian Census data. According to our interviews and the students' fieldwork (Bø, E. *et al.* 2014; TAMM, H. *et al.* 2015), about half of the RHOs in Roslepa and Spithami villages in Noarootsi and 10–30 percent in Borrbý, Kersleti and Rälby villages in Vormsi are Estonian Swedish (AUSDAHL, K. *et al.* 2014). They are overwhelmingly elderly people who are attached to their property because of their historical roots – the personal or their parents' memories – and the idyll of the beautiful coastal landscapes. According to municipal landowner registers, about 30 percent

of Noarootsi (2012) and 80 percent (2011) of Vormsi land belongs to people living outside of Estonia, mostly Estonian Swedes.

The majority of Estonian Swedes visit the area once a year. They are not interested in agricultural production, thus, they let their land to local farmers. Estonian Swedes pursue social activities in the summer, but these events are solely for the 'insiders'. Estonian Swedes' organisations such as Riguldi-Noarootsi Union in Noarootsi and Vormsi Kodukandi Union mainly attempt to maintain old traditions. Permanent residents think, that Estonian Swedes are peaceful and do not participate in local governance.

### Governance and leadership in Noarootsi and Vormsi

The municipality councils in Noarootsi as well as in Vormsi have nine members. Five parties in Vormsi and four parties and one single candidate in Noarootsi ran for the municipal council membership at the last (2013) elections. Noarootsi municipality has had four mayors between 1990 and 2014 and Vormsi municipality had 12 mayors subsequently.

Vormsi and Noarootsi municipalities practiced entirely different leadership styles until 2009. While Noarootsi experienced 22 years of sustained governance under one leader, Vormsi mayors were frequently replaced. Noarootsi mayor Ülo Kalm took office in 1987 as Pürksi Village Soviet chairperson when Estonia was still part of the Soviet Union. He was elected mayor after the establishment of the municipal system in Estonia and continued in that position through several re-elections until 2009. He arguably relied on broadly defined collaborative governance but due to his parentage, the municipal development action was clearly focussed on the development of Estonian-Swedish cultural heritage that used to be dominant in the area before the 1940s. Ülo Kalm, as a descendant of Estonian Swedes achieved very warm contacts with the Estonian-Swedish community that contributed significantly to local development.

The building of the so-called Coastal Swedish (Rannarootsi in Estonian) identity was definitely successful and the municipality became a popular touristic and recreational housing destination. However, the re-established Estonian-Swedish community is small and consists mainly of elderly RHOs recently. The Swedish people have not been extensively integrated into the local networks due to the language barriers, thus, they have a rather weak position in the local leadership. This gradually ageing and weakening community could not support the mayor in accomplishing his Estonian-Swedish agenda. Moreover, permanent residents and Estonian RHOs did not fully understand and accept the mayor's plan for uplifting of the vanishing Estonian-Swedish culture and community. Thus, the promotion of Coastal-Swedish identity could not be successful.

Estonian RHOs created a local party 'Better Noarootsi' for the 2009 elections. The personal motivation of RHOs and their representatives was predominantly related to new real estate developments and spatial planning procedures. They won 5 of the 9 local council mandates as they managed to get the support of the other RHOs. During the election campaign, they promised that Ülo Kalm would be re-elected but finally, they invited a new mayor. Voters who had thought that Ülo Kalm would be appointed again, thus, supported the RHO party were in shock. Local people collected 311 signatures to support Ülo Kalm, but the new council elected Aivar Kroon, a Noarootsi RHO and businessman as a mayor. Quite soon, he was replaced by a professional administrator Annika Kapp, an outsider from North-Estonia. Noarootsi informants stressed that municipal development was hindered significantly after Ülo Kalm had left; there were considerably fewer events and projects. Estonian Swedes emphasized that they had lost their connection with the municipality just because nobody was able to speak Swedish.

The majority of Vormsi mayors were businessmen who attempted to lead the municipality like a company. Some of them had no real connection with the local people

and even tried to manage the municipality from outside Vormsi, visiting the municipal office only while the meetings. Naturally, council members could not tolerate this. The municipality council had elected and then dismissed 12 mayors between 1991 and 2015 subsequently. Somewhat surprisingly, Vormsi people did not consider the endless change of mayors a substantial issue, because the most influential council members were always the same. Interviewees considered the frequently changing leadership as a consequence of the small size of the community and of the conflicts between permanent residents and RHOs stemming from their very different views on local life. Whereas permanent residents are mostly concerned with the availability and quality of local services they need in their daily practices (kindergarten, school, shop, etc.), while RHOs who consume those services at their permanent places of residence are concerned rather with ferry traffic, roads, power and security. To achieve their own goals, the latter group started to play power games. They joined the local party 'Wintertime in Vormsi too' (In Estonian: *Ka talvel Vormsil*) and registered their friends from the mainland to Vormsi to increase the number of trusted voters.

Actually, they carried out an electoral fraud that was reported even in the national media. 'Wintertime in Vormsi too' won the 2009 election, getting 5 mandates of the available 9. Two businessmen elected for the Vormsi council initiated a wind farm project immediately. This was unacceptable for both the permanent residents and also for RHOs. 169 people joined the meeting arranged by the municipality (2010) to discuss the windmill project that was finally rejected. It was the very first time when the majority of Vormsi people had a joint political action based on a consensus.

Nevertheless, there have been series of conflicts between permanent inhabitants and RHOs' representatives in the local council of Vormsi since the establishment of local government. RHOs were always active in influencing council members' decisions. Despite its small scale, there are no relationships

based on trust on the island: networks are either focused only on the villages or are temporary and dominated by interest groups – related to projects that need approval within the municipal council. Similarly to Noarootsi, the main motivation of Estonian RHOs for intervening in local governance was to accomplish their business ideas, for instance, to change the local planning regulations or to get a construction permit.

## Conclusion

Townpeople's growing incomes and extending opportunities to spend leisure time in geographically distant areas has increased their desire to possess property in the countryside with beautiful landscapes. Vormsi and Noarootsi rural municipalities – our case study areas – are coastal villages that were turned into recreational destinations and obtained a highly seasonal character. Recreational peripheries may well benefit from increased temporary population, who may act not only as consumers but also as active community members, able to enrich the bridging and enhancing the social capital of the communities. Nevertheless, so far, the involvement of RHOs in local leadership and governance has been studied insufficiently. This paper was an attempt to reduce this gap by analysing the power relations of the RHOs and the permanent population and by discussing whether the restructuring of local power reinforced or reduced peripherality.

According to FRISVOLL, S. (2012), social relations are crucial in the local cultural and economic development of rural peripheries. The synergies may work in both directions. Improving interpersonal relations and increasing social capital stimulates innovativeness and competitiveness (HORLINGS, I. 2010) that presupposes vital social relationships between RHOs and the local community. Otherwise, segregation, competitive behaviour, and the lack of communication between different interest groups tend to erode trust and reduce internal development capacity. Thus, culturally

heterogeneous places need particularly skilled leadership and wider involvement of interest groups in the decision making processes.

Our comparative case study showed how weak (Vormsi) or imbalanced participatory leadership (Noarootsi) raised dissatisfaction and how the ambition of the RHOs induced actions such as running for power to realise their own agendas. Local leaders of Vormsi and Noarootsi did not involve RHOs equally at the beginning. RHOs in turn did not join informal municipal networks; rather, they chose a few local collaborators to communicate with and to trust them as their representatives.

As a consequence, personal (business) interests started to dominate instead of collective values. Balanced municipal (community based) leadership was not considered important by any parties and the orchestration of various interests (the involvement of potential stakeholders in community development) was either missing or one-sided. As a result, a small number of RHOs – notably, young Estonian business persons – became strong stakeholders, increased their impact on local governance by incorporating some of the local leaders into their business schemes, and took over institutional power. However, other groups started to play a similar game, accelerating conflicts within the local councils.

Permanent residents became minorities in terms of the power relations and defending their interests in the municipal councils. The same applies to Estonian-Swedish communities: they actually own 80 percent of the land, while their influence on the municipal decision making is limited. Power games in local councils have induced some desperate actions by local people such as going to court or approaching national media to make disputed cases – which they lost at the municipal council – public. This did improve neither the image of the municipalities nor their internal solidarity. However, reflections in the national media made these places more 'visible' probably, contributing to local tourism businesses and recreational home development. Such processes call for further studies.

We may presume, recreational house owners are definitely capable of local leadership and under certain circumstances, they aspire also for being part of it. Their intervention definitely caused a major change in local governance. It is too early to say whether it had positive or rather negative consequences in the long run, but recreational peripheries are, in many cases, less 'peripheral' due to their actions and the social capital they possess. To reduce potential conflicts and release positive synergies, it is a crucial issue to involve RHOs in community life and to improve the relationships of different stakeholders (e.g., remote villagers) as much as possible. Local leaders as well as civil servants should be more aware of social processes and the ways in which these residents can be involved in local affairs for the mutual benefit of all parties.

Future research should consider the highly complex composition of both permanent and temporary population – there are always more than two groups involved in conflicts, organised often by villages and neighbourhoods, along various motives. As changes in leadership raise emotional reactions, an additional objective for future research should be the analysis of the actual (financial, economic) results of the different types of local governance models. Moreover, the impact of the media should also be studied – as coastal areas have a very positive image per se, even negative reflections may be beneficial to those places. Finally, we must also realise that the databases available – including even the population census – do not reflect the reality of the temporary population of recreational peripheries.

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# Geography in Visegrad and Neighbour Countries

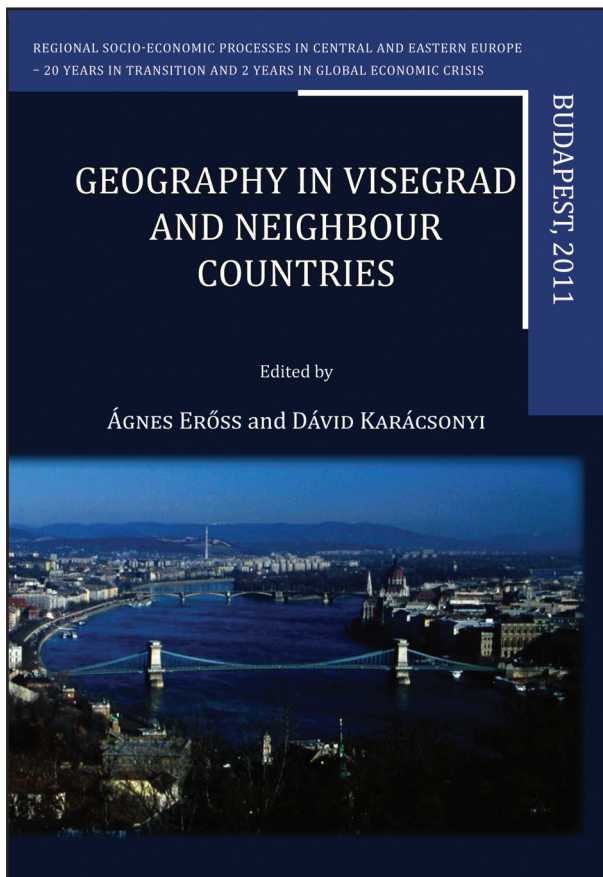
**Regional Socio-Economic Processes in Central and Eastern Europe –  
20 Years in Transition and 2 Years in Global Economic Crisis**

Edited by  
**ÁGNES ERŐSS and DÁVID KARÁCSONYI**

*Geographical Research Institute Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
Budapest, 2011. 169 p.*

During the last twenty years the erstwhile Soviet bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have taken distinct routes in post-socialist development, wherein the national trends and internal regional processes proved to be in deep contrast. Responses to the challenges of the global economic crisis also varied, repeatedly brought to the surface long

existing regional issues, structural problems and ethnic conflicts. Human geographers are divided in the assessment of the shifts that occurred during the past twenty years and the exchange of experience is vital for finding adequate answers to the new challenges. In order to provide a forum for discussion the Geographical Research Institute Hungarian Academy of Sciences with the generous support of the International Visegrad Fund Small Grant Programme organized a conference in order to induce the revival of contact between the institutes of geography of Visegrad Countries and their Western and Eastern neighbours. Present volume is a selection of presentations aiming to provide a deeper insight in socio-economic processes and their



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## LITERATURE

**Hartemink, A.E. and McSweeney, K. (eds.): Soil Carbon.** Progress in Soil Science, Springer, Heidelberg–New York–Dordrecht–London, 2014. 506 p.

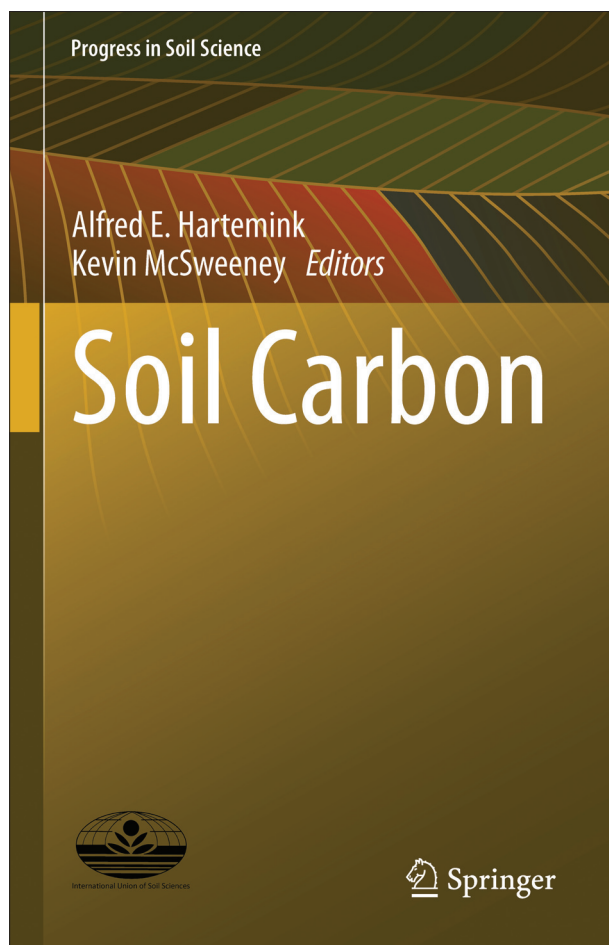
World soils contain approximately 1,500–2,000 Gtons of organic carbon in the top two meters. This large carbon reserve can increase atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> by soil misuse or mismanagement, or it can temperate the 'greenhouse' effect by proper land use and soil management. The recognition of importance of soil carbon reservoir on the climate and soil fertility led to increasing scientific activity on this field. Specific workshops and conferences on soil organic carbon (SOC) are a manifestation of increas-

ing scientific activity. The number of publications concerning SOC has been also increasing steadily since early 2000s. Actually, more than 1,500 papers per year cited by different scientific search engines.

International Union of Soil Science (IUSS) organised a Conference on Global Soil Carbon in June 2013, in Madison (Wisconsin, USA). 90 presentations were presented by more than 140 scientists from 35 countries. Organisers have invited 48 authors and teams to participate in this book. Chapters are grouped in four sections: I. Soil carbon in space and time; II. Soil carbon properties and processes; III. Soil use and carbon management; IV. Soil carbon and the environment. All of papers focus on novel and intriguing research from all over the world.

The first part of the book is an overview of the recent status of soil carbon research in the World's science. It summarizes the history, the recent scientific potential and new tendencies of these studies. Several authors emphasize importance of low carbon saturation of soils due to the agriculture and other human activities. However, capacity of the carbon sink depends on the land use (changes) and cultivation techniques, process of the carbon storage is proportional to molecular interactions between organic and mineral phase. The macro-scale studies are actually prevailed by SOC monitoring studies. The micro-scale researches on SOC follow these trends and deal with its chemical composition and structural properties. This part of the book provides a brief inventory of new developments for monitoring systems and the latest novel micro-morphological and analytical techniques for SOM.

Some of previously introduced analytical methods for studying SOC and molecular and microbial processes of soil organic matter (SOM) are overviewed in the second part of the book. Some of the chapters introduce applications of novel techniques (e.g. X-ray Fluorescence Molecular Spectroscopy, Quartz Crystal Micro-gravimetry) and few articles delineate new applications of traditional



methods, such as UV-Vis spectrometry and reflectance measurements. Most of the chapters deal with molecular structures of SOM and molecular processes of carbon storage in soils.

Chapters of the third part contain large scale studies: carbon management on different landscapes and the agro-technical aspects of the carbon sequestration. Selected teams have introduced new achievements to increase SOC absorption in the soils of the croplands and grasslands from tropical and subtropical Third World countries through the temperate zone (Europe, US) until the boreal areas.

Chapters of the fourth part (Soil and the environment) are loosely aggregated. Some of the chapters

are reviews on state of the art of soil mapping and on the relationship between climate change and soil carbon management. Most of the papers are overviews on the recent status of SOC researches of an area.

Soil Carbon is a new and high quality element of the Springer's Progress in Soil Science series. Several the authors (e.g. McBRATNEY, A.B.; MONGER, C.; POCH, R. etc.) belong to the top soil scientists of the world. This is an essential handbook for soil scientists, geographers and environmentalist to receive up to date knowledge about soil carbon.

ZOLTÁN SZALAI – GERGELY JAKAB

**Viktória Szirmai (ed): From spatial inequalities to social well-being.** Kodolányi János University of Applied Sciences, Székesfehérvár, 2015. 187 p.

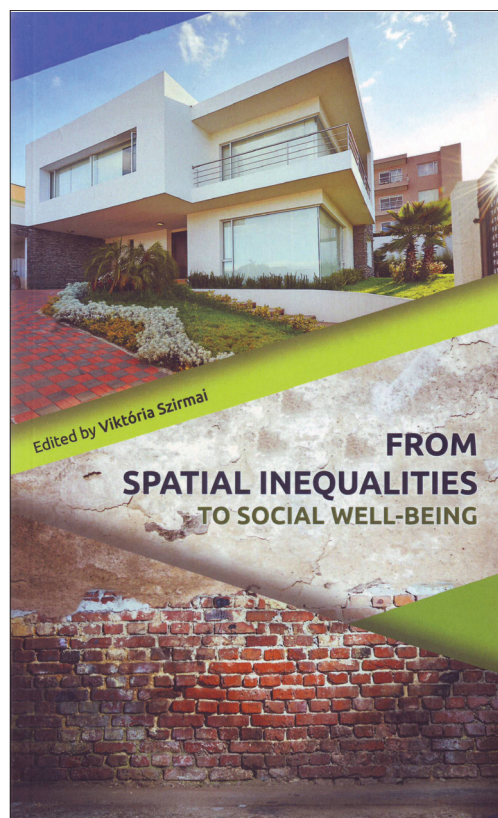
At the beginning of 2015 a substantial volume was published in Hungarian language edited by the prominent Hungarian sociologist Viktória SZIRMAI which contained studies on spatial inequalities and social well-being in the Hungarian context. Actually, the English version of the volume entitled "From spatial inequalities to social well-being" summarises the main results of the most exciting studies. Eight papers selected for the English version are obviously not enough to walk around the whole subject in detail, but more than enough to outline the main context of contemporary spatial inequalities and well-being in Hungary and to provide a careful analysis of the country-specific situation. In my review I try to summarise the main findings of the book in order to provide additional information to the public and researchers interested in the topic.

In her short introduction entitled „The history of researching social well-being in Hungary” Viktória SZIRMAI outlines the main concept of the volume. She

emphasises that the core concept of the book (i.e. ‘social well-being’) builds on the theoretical construct of A. Joseph STIGLITZ, Nobel Prize-winner American economist. The well-known Stiglitz Report published in 2009 stated that the GDP is an inappropriate index to measure social progress, thus, new indicators and analytical tools are needed for describing and modelling of social processes. Instead of one-dimensional indicators on production and economy so typical for the 1970s and 1980s the emphasis should be placed on the sophisticated measurement of social well-being. Viktória SZIRMAI draws the readers’ attention to the fact that the Stiglitz model unfortunately does not take into account the spatial aspects, namely national and regional characteristics. This is actually the main aim of the volume, to shed light on regional variations of social well-being of those living in metropolitan and rural areas through empirical surveys. The main question of the comprehensive research was how well-being is determined by spatial location and social structural positions of the population?

The initial statement of the study „Social well-being issues in Europe: The possibility of starting to establish a more competitive Europe” refers to the fact that European economy has lost its competitive advantages against other world regions since the 1980s, which resulted a gradual downsizing and reducing of welfare measures within national economic policies. Due to the withdrawing welfare systems in the last couple of decades rising urban poverty and intensifying migration processes could be detected throughout the EU member states. Next to impacts of globalisation processes the transformation of the welfare systems and administrative structures can also be mentioned, which induced polarisation processes in the regional structures: new spatial dependencies and disparities have emerged in Western Europe. Due to the emerging socio-economic differentiation spatial differences became more pronounced. The study comes to the conclusion that in the last two decades efforts in Europe to solve (or at least to soften) socio-economic and environmental problems have failed, and the civil sector could not show resounding success in this field either. That is the reason why the author assumes that the Stiglitz model could bring a new approach and more likely could lead to success in improving European competitiveness.

The chapter on „International study of public policies on well-being” provides an overview on the emergence and development of European welfare policies and examines how the question of well-being appears in significant international documents. Considering the achievements and failures of mod-



ernisation in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and based on the results of the UN-Habitat Sustainable Cities Programme the paper points out that social transformation of the CEE countries is actually completed, the standard of living has improved considerably but very unevenly, and significant concentrations of unemployment has emerged. According to the authors, large cities and metropolitan regions prevail in the settlement development contrary to small towns and rural regions, and regional development has become uneven. With regard to demographic trends low birth rates and ageing are the prime challenges to be solved in the CEE countries. The economy is characterised by a lack of co-operation, the social housing sector is weak due to the privatisation and a dramatic rise of housing and living costs could be observed in these countries. Thus, the European Union's urban development policy could not convey the urban development patterns and models everywhere in Europe. Actually, the new model for social well-being policy should be based on the characteristics of the local society and they should be conveyed clearly, the needs and satisfaction of local residents must be taken into account, and well-being for urban residents should appear as a priority issue in these policies. The study comes to the conclusion that European urban policies provide a mix of legislative and business models, and although elements of well-being issues appear often, well-being seems not to be the main objective of these policies.

The chapter on „The socio-demographic structure of the Hungarian Metropolitan Regions” deals with the socio-demographic conditions of 9 Hungarian metropolitan regions based on empirical analyses focusing on demography, migration, education and income conditions. Authors come to the conclusion that social conditions in metropolitan areas on the countryside are less favourable than in Budapest. Demographic indicators are deteriorating on the countryside, mainly due to the declining population figures and the growth of outmigration. Demographic and social differences among the major provincial cities and Budapest have clearly grown during the past decade.

In the next study „The spatial social characteristics of Hungarian metropolitan regions and the transformation of the core-periphery model” we get an insight into the transformation of the spatial structures of the investigated metropolitan regions. The chapter is based on comparative analyses of empirical research results carried out in 2005 and 2014 with the same methodology. Results of the first survey in 2005 showed that inner-city areas could be characterised by a strong socio-spatial hierarchy, and the social status of the population clearly dropped towards the periphery. Due to the outmigration of middle-class people to the suburbs inner-urban areas became strongly differentiated, whereas the social upgrading of the

periphery gained momentum. Results from 2014 survey suggest a strong regional and social polarisation. On the one hand, the spatial expansion of higher status strata could be detected, on the other hand, the level of social exclusion has clearly increased. While inside the compact cities spatial disparities somewhat decreased, the social status of neighbourhoods levelled out, at the peripheries (both inside and outside the city-limits) new better-off residential areas emerged. This could be predominantly traced back to the outmigration of higher status groups. The process is labelled by the authors as ‘suburbanisation inside the city’. Anyway, according to the empirical data the status of the city centre has nowhere diminished, and thanks to the sporadic gentrification processes the core cities will most probably maintain (or even increase) their socio-economic status.

The upcoming study „Social well-being characteristics and spatial-social determinations” examines the already well-known metropolitan regions but this time the characteristics of well-being are addressed. Authors detect the patterns of Stiglitzian dimensions (i.e. material living standards, health, education, personal activities, political voice and governance, social connections and relationships, environment, insecurity) on intra-urban and regional scale in Hungary. According to the investigations they conclude that due to the strengthening weight of the middle class, and the ongoing polarisation within the society the inner-city will most probably continue to play a leading role in the core-periphery model, however, the transition zone seems to become more mosaic-like.

The chapter entitled „Well-being deficits in disadvantaged regions” provides a comprehensive assessment of the so-called ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ well-being in four disadvantageous micro-regions. In order to explore the level of ‘objective’ well-being in the case study areas educational attainment, labour market position and financial situation of the population are compared in the first section of the study. Different characteristics of ‘subjective’ well-being are presented through the analysis of differences in term of happiness and satisfaction. All indicators for objective and subjective well-being are the weakest in peripheral marginalised communities, and differences are most pronounced in the case of objective well-being. Among determining social and economic factors for well-being deficits aging, decreasing population, stagnation of the local economy, lack of industrial activities and reduction in employment can be mentioned. Peripheralisation, economic marginalisation and negative demographic processes could not be significantly improved even by government measures.

In the final chapter of „How can we get from spatial inequalities to social well-being?” the editor of the book concludes that globalisation produces inequalities and the global economy actually works in inequalities effectively. International research on



competitiveness also testifies this experience. Over the past decades a significant deconcentration (of jobs and people) has taken place, and urban areas have been torn to developed and underdeveloped areas. In particular, social and spatial differences have become very conspicuous especially between metropolitan and rural disadvantaged micro-regions. Thus, in the coming years it would be important to reduce regional disparities and to support the development of well-being. The way out could be the assessment of the level of well-being of various social strata in urban and rural areas, and after defining well-being deficits differentiated steps should be performed in order to increase the well-being of these social strata.

We can conclude that the aesthetically pleasing, properly illustrated book gives a good insight into the social well-being issue of metropolitan and rural areas in Hungary. The merit of the book is that

the outcomes are predominantly based on empirical research and a comparative and interdisciplinary approach is applied.

The quality of the book could have been further improved with valuable photos, which could have provided a better understanding of local conditions to foreigners and readers without knowledge of local (Hungarian) circumstances. In any case, the book is a good starting point for those who deal with social differentiation of metropolitan areas in CEE and more specifically in Hungary, or want to get deeper insight into the subject of social well-being. Honourable is the work of the editor because the joint research and publishing of the book have successfully contributed to the cooperation of sociology and geography.

TAMÁS EGEDY

## CHRONICLE

**Report on the 5<sup>th</sup> EUGEO Congress***30 August – 2 September 2015, Budapest*

Since 2007 EUGEO, the Association of Geographical Societies in Europe, has been organising its congresses every second year at various locations. After Amsterdam (2007), Bratislava (2009), London (2011), and Rome (2013) in 2015 Budapest had the opportunity to organise the 5<sup>th</sup> EUGEO Congress. By now, this series has become the most important European geographical congress to promote exchange of knowledge, information and best practices among geographers in Europe and beyond.

The only major international geographical conference to be held in Hungary was the IGU regional conference in 1971. Since then the Iron Curtain was lifted, old boundaries were dismantled in Europe, and a new generation of geographers has grown up. Therefore, the organisation of a major geographical

event hosted by Hungary was more than timely. The importance of EUGEO congresses has grown since the first Amsterdam meeting, the number of participants and the diversity of sessions have also greatly increased, reflecting the growing demand of geographers for this Pan-European academic meeting. The initiative of EUGEO founding fathers to make the biennial congresses easily accessible for young geographers undoubtedly created good opportunities for early career researchers to introduce themselves and establish scientific contacts which are especially important for international collaboration, joint projects and publications.

Traditionally, EUGEO congresses also warmly welcome “non Europeans” and “non geographers” among the participants which makes this event more



Welcome speech of Zoltán Kovács at the opening ceremony of the Congress

open minded, inclusive and interdisciplinary. This was also the case in Budapest, where multidimensional sight showed up in different sessions and in different discussion. Where one of the most frequent debates concentrated on different environmental processes and their effects on the society, equality and fairness, sustainability and efficiency.

The programme of the Budapest Congress started on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August with registration and a cheerful Icebreaker Party. Next morning the opening ceremony took place in the spectacular setting of the Ceremonial Hall of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS). As first speaker Zoltán Kovács, Vice-President of the Hungarian Geographical Society and Chairman of the Organising Committee noted that the motto of the congress „Convergences and Divergences of Geography in Europe” reflects the way in which geography has developed in the recent past. The mushrooming of new research topics, the far-reaching specialisations and not least the strengthening co-operation between geographers and representatives of other disciplines all loosened up the traditional boundaries of geography. According to his expectation the congress would shed light on the question if divergence is pervasive within our discipline or it goes hand in hand with certain tendencies of convergence among various sub-disciplines, countries and schools.

As second speaker Henk OTTENS President of EUGEO welcomed the delegates. He emphasised that EUGEO 2015 takes place in a period of tension, uncertainty and warfare, both within and at the borders of Europe. Political Geography, in particular European geopolitics and financial geographies, rightly have been given a prominent place among the themes to be presented and discussed at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of EUGEO. Space-time dynamics are at the heart of geographical inquiry, and geographers should continue to give priority to closely monitor and interpret these dynamics. Many sessions were devoted also to this theme. Vulnerability of and hazards in the natural environment, often related to climate change and sustainability of resources were also among the main topics of the congress. Finally, Geoinformation Science, as he commented, continues to be a thriving interdisciplinary field and business opportunity that needs substantial geographic input and the new data and methods that are developed should be exploited in geographical research and applications. In this respect the Budapest Congress could also open up new perspectives. The first two welcome greetings were followed by a short performance of the string quintet of Concerto Budapest entitled ‘The Sounds of Hungary’.

In the second part of the opening ceremony Ádám Török, Secretary General of the Hungarian



Welcome speech of Ádám Török at the opening ceremony of the Congress

Academy of Sciences, András KISFALUDY, Vice-Rector of Eötvös Loránd University and Alexandra SZALAY-BOBROVNICZKY, Vice Mayor of Budapest warmly welcomed participants of the 5<sup>th</sup> EUGEO Congress from all over the world. After the welcome speeches the first two keynote lectures were delivered.

After the opening ceremony bus transfer was provided the delegates to the main congress venue, the Lágymányos Campus of Eötvös Loránd University where 520 papers were presented in 60 sessions in the next two and a half day. The Congress also gave opportunity to present posters at the poster session, where 31 posters were exhibited.

Every day two keynote lectures were followed by the curious participants. The first day Jean POESEN from Belgium questioned if we need more researches in soil erosion hazard and mitigation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The answer is undoubtedly in the affirmative, whilst soil protection should be more coordinated on integrational level within the EU, as one of the most important natural resource. Also on the first day Herman VAN DER WUSTEN from the Netherlands talked about 'Imagined communities and practiced geopolitics' which is getting more and more important in today's infocommunication-based world. In the evening a special lecture was given by Norbert CSIZMADIA from Pallas Athéné Geopolitical Foundation, Hungary – one of the biggest sponsors of

the Congress – shared ideas how vision and strategy evolve from a single idea, and how the 'new economy' will born via political and economic reforms. The first day of the Congress culminated in the social dinner where old friends could reunite again and new friendships could be established

On Tuesday after the parallel sessions Eleonore KOFMAN from the United Kingdom talked about 'Mobilities and Migrations in Europe: a problematic dichotomy' in her keynote lecture. This was followed by Michael A. FULLEN's presentation on 'Closed loop recycling and Physical Geography'. The afternoon sessions closed at 7 pm. It was also Tuesday afternoon when the EUGEO had its General Assembly. The General Assembly discussed among others new applications for membership in EUGEO, and future congresses and seminars. In the evening the Gala dinner of the Congress took place in the fascinating Gerbeaud House.

On Wednesday after the morning sessions the first keynote speech was delivered by Peter MEUSBURGER who talked about the importance of scientific setting, knowledge environments in the recent scientific life. Professor MEUSBURGER became Honorary Member of the Hungarian Geographical Society in 2010, and this year he received the Lóczy Lajos Plaque, for his outstanding activity in establishing and maintaining close relationships between Hungarian and German



In the first plenary session Herman VAN DER WUSTEN delivering his keynote lecture





In the second plenary session Eleonore KOFMAN delivering her keynote lecture



The General Assembly of EUGEO discussing future joint activities



geography. The ceremony of the award took place after his keynote lecture.

Judit TIMÁR as the last keynote speaker focused on the 'Convergences and divergences of geographies from an East-Central European perspective' which gave and gives perfect theoretical frame for the whole Congress. TIMÁR highlighted the fact that from a post-socialist, East Central European point of view general geographic processes, described, defined, conceptualised in the "west" have different meaning. Wednesday afternoon the closing ceremony took place in the plenary room from 5 pm. First, Zoltán Kovács summarised the first main results of the Congress, then the plans of the next EUGEO congress were introduced by Christian VANDERMOTTEN. Finally, Henk OTTENS expressed his warm thanks to the local organisers for the great event.

In the following paragraphs I try to refer to some sessions where the post-socialist context came into discussion. New and traditional approaches made the session of electoral geography diverse. A question emerged if traditional social patterns or newly occurring global trends are influencing voting behaviour through different scales more. But not only the aspects of drivers were discussed, but also perspectives of space. It was questioned if place, position and border have the same role in political geography researches in East Central Europe and Western Europe. The session also disputed how power restructures the

above mentioned features. One of the most important conclusions of the slots of these sessions is the recognition of the emergence of radical movements and parties in Europe in the last decade.

Several informal meetings took place during the Congress to dispute recent processes and to strengthen international cooperation in research. Hungarian researchers engaged in economic geography started an initiative to establish a subcommittee to foster researches on recent economic processes and support the institutionalisation of economic geography in Hungary.

A critical geographical initiative took place in Gólya, the cult meeting point for critical thinkers and activists in recent years. The Critical Urban Research and Action group was founded in Valtice, Czech Republic and aims to connect European researchers dealing with post-socialist urban transformation, policy-making, involvement from perspective of post-colonialism, poststructuralism and political economy. The group also aims to find out how researchers can theorise the city in a changing political and power structure. Linking to the critical aspects several sessions and slots referred to conceptualising new and old urban spaces. The question arose many times who has right to the city, who is controlling urban growth, public spaces, residential areas. The sessions on power, resistance, occupation discussed recent debates on use, transformation and modification of space.



Peter MEUSBURGER receives the Lóczy Lajos Plaque



The main Congress Venue, in the Lágymányos Campus of Eötvös Loránd University



Cheerful delegates, geographers, friends





Henk OTTENS, President of EUGEO summarises his experiences at the closing ceremony

Sessions dealt with topics which for the first sight seemed to work with traditional geographical perspective. Later it turned out that even the most traditional papers had some new innovation. The case of urban spatial processes highlighting migration, segregation, gentrification and suburbanisation. Presenters and discussants pointed out that the mentioned processes should be analysed on different scales, in which local and micro-scale effects should be emphasised. Ethnic and minority groups, such as deprived communities were named as the main stakeholders of the disadvantages of newly evolved urban processes. Many sessions also discussed recent migration trends in Europe, the possible scenarios and real or imagined outcomes, especially in the East Central European region.

Papers on life quality introduced recent trends and approaches how the so-called traditional statistical accounting changes to more qualitative aspects. The starting point was a complex point of view where environment, not only the built but the natural as well, is taken into account. There are problematic and hardly defensible indices used in the last decades to find out nature's impact on individuals and social groups. Several papers applied GIS techniques to map spatial inequalities in connection with health, well being and quality of life. As a conclusion it can be summarised that we are only at the beginning of establishing a valid, working and universal index for life quality, there is much more to be done, and researchers are just slowly approximating.

During the three days of the congress field trips were also provided by the local organisers. These city tours were very popular among the delegates as they could visit different parts of Budapest. Three different perspectives of Budapest were offered: a traditional touristic sight-seeing, a waterfront development and industrial transformation-theme, and one with different aspects of urban regeneration processes.

As a conclusion, after the initial phase EUGEO congresses the 5<sup>th</sup> Budapest Congress became more international and attractive than the organisers and the participants originally expected. Outdoor programmes gave good opportunity to discover Budapest and its surroundings and to know each other better, strengthening the connections among geographers which hopefully will lead to further cooperations. The wide-range of geographical and interdisciplinary topics gave the opportunity the delegates to get a little insight how recent geographical researches seek to answer challenges caused by environmental, social and economic changes. The next EUGEO Congress will take place in Brussels the capital of Belgium in 2017. We sincerely hope that many of those who attended the successful EUGEO 2015 congress will also join the next one.

GYULA NAGY

## GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Hungarian Geographical Bulletin (formerly Földrajzi Értesítő) is a double-blind peer-reviewed English-language quarterly journal publishing open access **original scientific works** in the field of physical and human geography, methodology and analyses in geography, GIS, environmental assessment, regional studies, geographical research in Hungary and Central Europe. In the regular and special issues also discussion papers, chronicles and book reviews can be published.

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We accept most word processing formats, but MSWord files are preferred. Submissions should be single spaced and use 12pt font, and any track changes must be removed. The paper completed with abstract, keywords, text, figures, tables and references should not exceed **6000 words**.

The Cover Page of the article should only include the following information: title; author names; a footnote with the affiliations, postal and e-mail addresses of the authors in the correct order; a list of 4 to 8 keywords; any acknowledgements.

An abstract of up to **300 words** must be included in the submitted manuscript. It should state briefly and clearly the purpose and setting of the research, methodological backgrounds, the principal findings and major conclusions.

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Submit each illustration as a separate file. Figures and tables should be referred in the text. Numbering of figures and tables should be consecutively in accordance with their appearance in the text. Lettering and sizing of original artwork should be uniform. Convert the images to TIF or JPEG with an appropriate resolution: for colour or grayscale photographs or vector drawings (min. 300 dpi); bitmapped line drawings (min. 1000 dpi); combinations bitmapped line/photographs (min. 500 dpi). Please do not supply files that are optimized for screen use (e.g., GIF, BMP, PICT, WPG). Size the illustrations close to the desired dimensions of the printed version. Be sparing in the use of tables and ensure that the data presented in tables do not duplicate results described elsewhere in the article.

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*Examples:* (RIDGEWELL, A.J. 2002; MAHER, B.A. *et al.* 2010) or RIDGEWELL, A.J. (2002); MAHER, B.A. *et al.* (2010)

*Journal papers:*

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